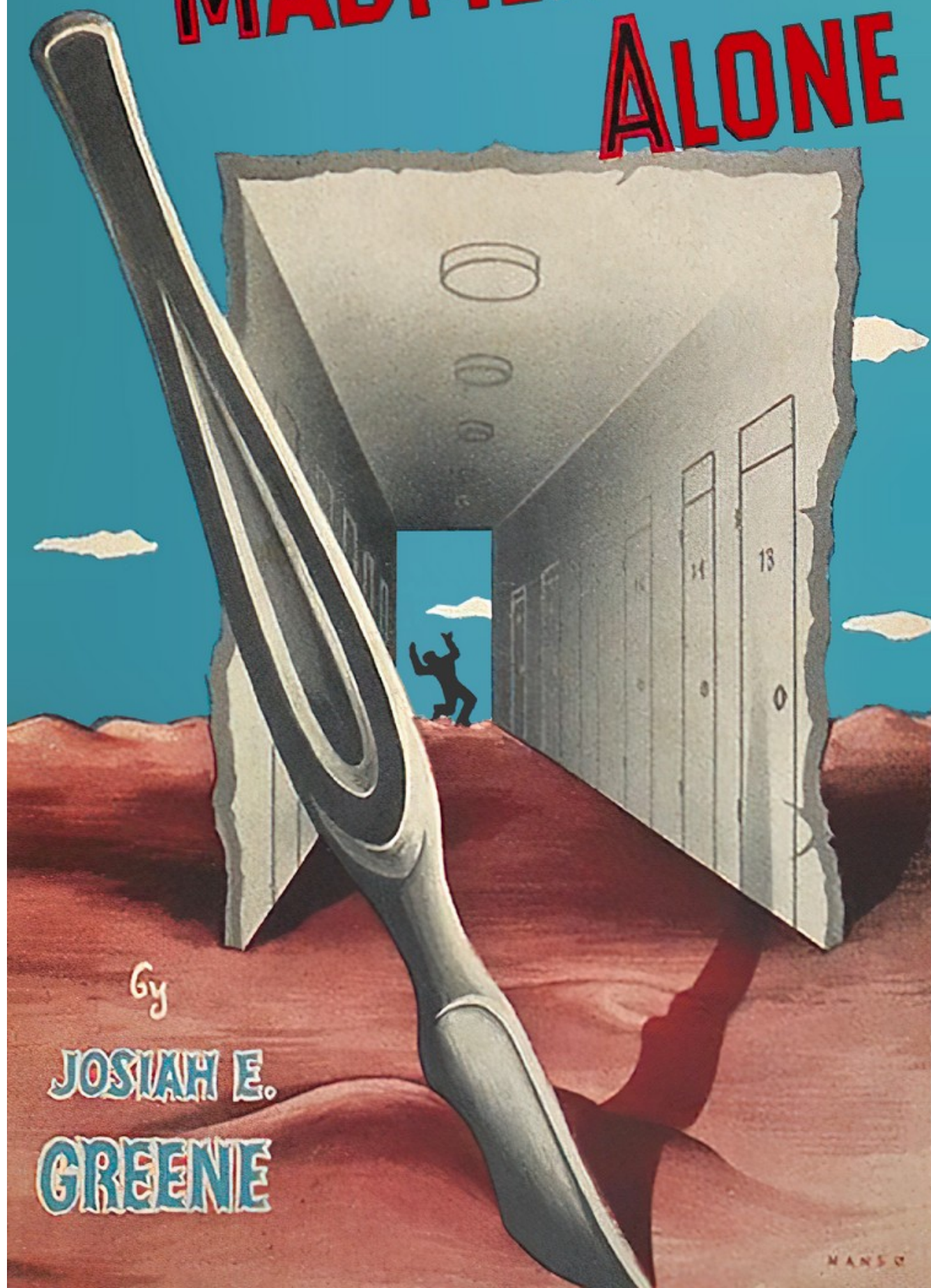
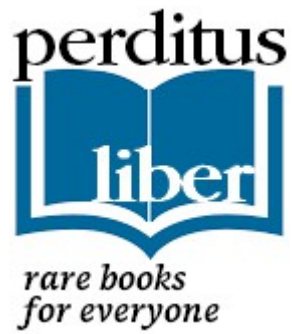


# MAD MEN DIE ALONE



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JOSIAH E.  
GREENE



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## **Madmen Die Alone**

by

Josiah E. Greene

Published 1938



The whole asylum seemed to be listening ... listening ... not, this time, for a maniac's scream, but for the terror-filled cry of an escaped madman's victim!

Somewhere in the distance—in a wing or on another floor—a woman began to laugh, an inane laugh that hung like an echo on the air. That was all, except for a murmur in the halls and the querulous excitement of patients.

In a mental institution, a scream is not unusual. Why, then, wondered Captain Prescott of the Zenith police, was Exeter Hospital so frighteningly quiet, as though *waiting* for something? And then it came, a girl's voice—like a hurt child's—ringing through the corridors, crying a man's name. For the twisted figure of Dr. Sylvester, brilliant young psychiatrist, had been found, knees drawn up, hands clenched in death.

A homicidal maniac like Joseph Parisi, loose in the city, was hell for the police. But *murder* meant a field-day for the papers, false leads, frightened women, panic....

Was this a madman's crime? Had someone purposely turned a lunatic loose? Before Prescott could answer, something else happened to make his case even more like a fight alone in the dark.



# **Madmen Die Alone**

By JOSIAH E. GREENE



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MADMEN DIE ALONE

## CHAPTER I

### Silence

THE corridor was empty.

There were nine doors, four on one side, five on the other. The first on the left was numbered 310, and it was a crack ajar....

Next to it was 312, and across the hall, opposite them, were 311 and 313. Then there were two alcoves, one on either side, furnished with desks, chairs, lamps, filing cases, and, in the one on the right, a telephone. Beyond these were the doors of 314 and 316 on the left, 315 and 317 opposite. 318 was the fifth door on the left, and across from it was a lighted oblong where the hallway right-angled into the wing.

Two naked bulbs burned, not too brightly, in the ceiling and were reflected dully from the yellow unadorned cement-plaster of the walls, and from the two-toned gray of the tiled floor. Two clocks, one in either alcove, ticked irregularly, the only sound to break the dead silence.

Then, somewhere in the distance—in a wing or on another floor—a woman began to laugh, an inane laugh that went on and on until a door closed, and then hung like an echo on the air until even that vanished.

The corridor remained empty and silent.

The door of 312 opened and the short, slight figure

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of a man was framed in the rectangle of light as he paused to look back before padding down to the alcove on rubber-soled shoes.

A second figure took his place, a bulky one this time. This man also glanced back, and then turned off the light inside the room. Before he closed the door, he asked, in a hushed tone, "Shall I leave this ajar, Dave?"

The first man, already at his desk, looked up, considering. "No," he said. "It's so quiet tonight we'll hear him if he wakes up."

There was a click of the latch as the bulky young man pulled the door shut.

He stood, fumbling in the pocket of his white uniform for a handkerchief, and then, having found it, moved toward the alcove, mopping his face.

"What's the matter?" asked David Wiese tonelessly.

If there was a gleam of malicious humor deep behind the question, it failed to show in face or voice; but then, David Wiese rarely permitted anything to



show. He was a dingy little man with a lifelessly impassive face and all the nervous qualities of an automaton.

“Nothing,” his companion answered, and because it sounded so inadequate, added, “It’s hot as hell, that’s all.”

Wiese said, “You’ll get used to it.”

He was not referring to the heat.

The younger man, grinning sheepishly, sat down and tilted his chair against the wall. His name was Tom Jensen. He was broad in the shoulders, had curly chestnut hair on top of a good-featured face,

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and a big, powerful frame, and was ashamed of the unsteadiness that his trembling hands were betraying.

Apologetically he said, “I thought I’d got over being squeamish, but that business—It’s so damn—inhuman!”

David Wiese said, “Yeah,” flatly.

He twisted the gooseneck lamp closer and took a patient’s chart from the desk drawer. It was headed EXETER HOSPITAL. Beneath this had been written the building and the patient’s number—“Hughes, 312”—and the date: “Tuesday, July 18.” There were already half a dozen entries.

Wiese, glancing at the clock, began to write. He wrote painfully, his fountain pen creaking on the paper and sending little shivers up Jensen’s spine. The entry read:

“11:34—Patient complained again of persecution and became violently excited. Impossible to keep him clothed. Yesterday’s sexual manifestations reappeared. Also the abnormally quick reactions of a week ago—”

The pen stopped creaking. Wiese lifted his head and stared with unseeing eyes across the hall. In the silence, Jensen laughed.

“You do it, too,” he said.

“Do what?”

“Listen.” It was satisfying to catch the imperturbable Wiese at a novice trick. Inside, Wiese was probably as sensitive as he was himself, and no doubt in time Jensen could grow a protective shell as effective as the older man’s. He said, “You were listening, as

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we all do, for a sound—a cry, perhaps—knowing it can't be as still as this when we're surrounded by—maniacs!"

"Patients," Wiese corrected.

"Call them what you like—"

Wiese grunted. "Less imagination would do you good," he said.

"Oh, I know! It needs the temperament of an oyster to take care of these people—if you can call them people. But—you were listening, too."

"Thinking."

"Yeah?"

"Thinking," repeated Wiese, flatly, "that Sylvester would be interested in those quick reactions."

"Oh," said Jensen. He added, "Maybe."

Neither moved. Tom caught himself at the trick of which he had just accused Wiese, and said quickly, "There's a queer bird, that Sylvester. How does he get on so well with patients?"

"Maybe because he's as crazy as they are."

"Who wouldn't be, working with them!" And, as Wiese got to his feet, "Where now?"

"To see if he's still in 310."

"Why? 312's asleep now—"

"Don't kid yourself," said Wiese. "Not for long. And Sylvester'd stay till morning to see something interesting."

"Interesting!" snorted Tom Jensen.

"He's probably gone by now," Wiese added. "He'd been with Parisi quite a while before we went to 312."

"Parisi's door was still ajar a minute ago. I saw the light."

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Wiese went down the corridor, past 312 to the door of 310. Jensen had been right: it was a crack ajar.

And then a sudden sense of something wrong touched David Wiese. There was not a sound from the room, though the light was on, and this was unusual, for its occupant, Joseph Parisi, was not a quiet person in his waking hours. It meant, certainly, that Dr. Sylvester had gone, but so absolute was the silence that there might have been no one there at all.

Wiese was sensitized to things out of the ordinary, as were all attendants in Hughes Hall, well aware that they had charge of the most dangerous inmates of Exeter Hospital. A sense of personal danger came to him, for he knew how dangerous Parisi could be.

Cautiously he pushed the door open. Nothing happened. The room seemed empty.

The bathroom door was not closed, though there was no light inside. Premonition disturbing his usual impassiveness, he flicked his tongue quickly over dry lips.

“Joe!” he called. His voice was still flat, but something in it made Tom Jensen, in the alcove, lift his head.

There was no answer.

Wiese entered 310 slowly, looking behind the door, reminding himself that he had always been able to handle Joseph Parisi. Slowly, keeping a nervous watch of other possible hiding places, he crossed to the bathroom, switched on the light, and looked inside.

There was nothing there.

It took him a moment to realize what it meant:

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that Parisi was not hiding, but gone! Loose in the building!

Personal apprehension gave way to panic, and he called, “Joe!” a second time, loudly, in a voice that had cracked away from its dead level. But Wiese’s emotions never ran away with him, and panic yielded at once to the necessity of making sure, and giving the alarm.

He heard Tom’s chair click on the tiles, and the thudding of his sneakers coming down the hall, but he did not wait. Hastily he canvassed the few hiding places. But Joseph Parisi was gone.

Jensen reached the door. “What’s the matter?” he asked.

Wiese shoved him aside, stepped into the hall, and stood looking up and down for a moment. There was nothing to be seen, nothing to be heard. The building’s silence was unbroken.

“What’s the matter?” Jensen repeated.

“Parisi’s loose!”

Jensen drew a sharp breath.

“Get a search started,” said David Wiese. “Quick! Tell ’em to search in pairs, Tom ... Joseph Parisi’s a killer!”

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## CHAPTER II

### A Young Man is Sick

TOM JENSEN suggested hurriedly, "We might save time searching this corridor first."

Wiese shook his head. "We might, but we might save a life if we spread the news fast enough. He's probably violent, and if so, he may hurt someone—or kill them—if we can't warn people in time."

"Right!" Tom nodded.

"Take the women's side on this floor," Wiese ordered, "and both sides on the second. I'll locate Cummings and Bernstein, and then go down to the first to make sure about Dennis."

"Right!" repeated Jensen.

"And, Tom—for God's sake, be careful!"

Cummings and Bernstein, the other nurses on night duty in that corridor, would be in 315, Wiese thought. It was the former's patient, but Bernstein had been helping him off and on all evening.

But Cummings was alone in 315 when Wiese opened the door. The patient was quiet. Cummings came at once in response to Dave's beckoning finger.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Wiese drew him into the corridor. "Parisi's loose!" he said.

Cummings whistled. "Parisi!" he said. "Damn!"

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Wiese nodded. "The corridor's been empty. He must have sneaked out."

"But—hell! What got into him? That's not like Parisi!"

"I know it isn't," snapped Wiese. "But he's gone, and probably dangerous. Find Bernstein, will you? I'm going down to the first floor. Tom's warning the rest."

"All right. Bernie and I'll get started here."

"Better wait till we're back. He's dangerous, I said!"

Cummings was right: it was not like Joseph Parisi. Never in seven years of nursing him had Wiese observed trickiness in his nature—only out-and-out violence. Hurrying down the corridor to the center of the building where the stairs and the elevator were, Wiese wondered what it meant.

Certainly Parisi must be in a state of acute mania—which was to say, murderously violent; but what new element had crept in?

Unable, in his impatience, to wait for the ascent of the elevator, Wiese chose the stairs and raced down the two flights to the foyer. There, abruptly, he halted.

A vague sound of movement was growing on the upper floors, but here there was neither sound nor movement save for the butting of a moth against the light fixture in the ceiling.

And the office—where Johnny Dennis should have been—was empty.

For the second time since he had entered 310, panic touched Wiese. He had envisioned Parisi loose in the building, but not even in that first moment had it occurred to him that the madman might have escaped

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from Hughes Hall altogether, for Hughes was a new building, particularly designed to house the hospital's dangerous patients, and it was supposed to be escape-proof.

Anyone who left the building must pass through the foyer, for the single ground floor entrance was there. And one corner of the foyer was set off by a wooden partition topped, at chest height, with glass. This was the office, and it commanded the entrance, the three ground floor corridors that converged there, the stairs and the elevator that were the only access to the upper floors, and the spring-locked door that led to the basement.

One man, stationed in the office, controlled the building.

If—of course—he was on his job.

And Dennis, whose shift it was, was missing. Why? How long?

Wiese had the sudden conviction that it had been long enough for Joseph Parisi to escape. And a homicidal maniac loose meant—

He called, "Dennis!" sharply, without anticipating any result.

There was a surprised "Yes?" from the entrance-way.

Reaction claimed Wiese. He said, "Oh!" flatly, crossing the foyer.

Dennis came through the doorway and joined him in the little vestibule between it and the foyer. He was a rangy young man with the striking blondness of the Scandinavian, but there was something queer about his eyes.

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"You want me?" he asked. His voice, too, was not right.

“Where were you?”

Dennis hesitated. “On the steps. The office was hot, and I needed a breath of air. I’ve had a headache.”

“Been watching the stairs?”

“Well-no.”

“Seen anyone leave the building?”

The boy frowned. “What’s the matter, Dave?”

Wiese told him.

Dennis’ eyes slid past the nurse to search the foyer in a single rapid glance, and a strained look appeared in his face. Then he said, deliberately, firmly, “No one’s left the building, Dave. I’ve been standing in that doorway for half—for three quarters—of an hour. No one’s gone out.”

“But Parisi might have come downstairs?”

“You’d better have them search this floor.”

Wiese nodded, turned back to the foyer, and swung down the right-hand corridor toward the men’s side of the building.

He was bothered. The premonition of Parisi’s escape, which Dennis’ flat denial should have killed, was still there. The madman must be in the building if Johnny had been where he claimed, but, unreasonably, Wiese was sure he would not be found.

An attendant, Mat Loomis, lounging alone in his alcove, looked up from a magazine, but did not bother to say hello.

“A patient’s loose,” said Wiese. “Joseph Parisi. Get a search started here and in the wing.”

“Why?” asked Loomis, without moving. “I’ve been

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here an hour or more. No one’s been down this corridor.”

“Get a search started,” repeated Wiese evenly.

Loomis shrugged eloquently, rising. He crossed the hall with an insolent lack of hurry, and, opening a door, leaned inside. “Mr. Wiese wants us to play hide and seek with his patient, Bill,” he said lightly. “Can you spare a minute?”

Another attendant appeared in the doorway, and Wiese said, “Parisi’s loose—and dangerous. Get a search going, and be careful!”

“Let’s wait till morning,” said Loomis. “We’re afraid of the dark.”

But the other nurse said, “Come on, Mat. This is serious.”

Wiese recrossed the foyer toward the women's side. Dennis, quite pale, watched him from the vestibule, but neither spoke. Ahead, down the corridor, the door of 102 opened, and a nurse came out.

"Miss Lewis!" Wiese called, stopping her. She waited, a cool girl, tall and dark. He repeated his news bluntly, but there was no visible reaction. Her voice, acknowledging his instructions, was matter-of-fact. He added his warning: "Be very careful. You'd better search in pairs, and don't hesitate to call for help if you locate him. Dennis is in the foyer and will hear you."

She said, "Is he?" in a surprised way, and then corrected herself with a little laugh: "But, of course! ... We'll be careful, Mr. Wiese."

A little rattled after all, Wiese thought; you could hardly blame her. He went back to the foyer.

Miss Lewis started in the opposite direction, halted

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suddenly and called, "Mr. Wiese!" but he was gone. She hesitated; then went to the alcove, where Miss Stilles was.

Miss Stilles received the news philosophically. "After wrestling with that lulu of mine all evening, I can take on Joseph Parisi and a couple more," she said. "Let's get the others."

"You find them, Anne. I—" Miss Lewis hesitated. "I've got something to return to Johnny Dennis."

She hurried down the corridor, her starched skirts rustling.

On the third floor Cummings and Bernstein had started the search. Wiese joined Tom Jensen who was already at his post where the passage angled into the wing.

Searches were routine. One attendant, or a pair of them, remained at the angle of the corridor to watch in both directions, making sure the quarry did not break cover unobserved; the others went from room to room. Repeated simultaneously throughout the building, the search was rapid and thorough, taking scarcely ten minutes even when, as at present, it was necessary to go in pairs.

Hughes was no longer silent. A murmur rose in the halls, a vague sound combining the moving of feet and the swishing of clothes with the low-pitched note of voices, the opening and closing of doors, and the querulous excitement of patients unavoidably disturbed.

Unspeaking, Wiese and Jensen listened to the hunt. Cummings and Bernstein and three pairs of nurses in the wing moved methodically from room to room. The clocks in the alcove ticked irregularly. And

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gradually, almost imperceptibly, the sound of movement began to die.

Parisi had not been found in the wing. Cummings, emerging from 318, reported his job complete without result. And somewhere, on another floor, a woman began to laugh, inanely, tonelessly, mocking the effort of the search and crowing the triumph of the lunatic escaped.

Tom Jensen shivered. Wiese said, "He's not been found. A couple of you hold the corridor while I get the keys."

He had not been found. A pair of attendants stood at the mouth of each corridor on each floor, and all of them had the same report. They would remain there until the rest of the search, the last hope, had been completed. There were, in the central portion of the building, treatment, consultation, examination rooms, service closets, surgeries and lavatories; also the dining halls on the ground floor and the big solariums over them on the floors above. With the exception of the lavatories, these were locked at night, and the chance that Joseph Parisi could have found his way into any of them was slight. Still, someone might have been careless.

Wiese had no such hopes, though the job would be finished methodically. Parisi was gone. Even in the face of Johnny Dennis' denial, he was gone.

To Wiese, returning to the foyer, Dennis looked sick. He was livid, and stood supporting his weight against the jamb of the vestibule doorway. He had already heard the first floor reports, and he could have guessed the rest. The spot he was in was enough to make anyone sick, Wiese thought.

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He drew a long breath. "If you'll get the keys—" he said, glancing toward the office.

"They're here," said Johnny, and took them from his pocket. "They were used earlier."

He tossed them, but the throw was weak, and they jangled on the floor. Wiese, picking them up, asked, "Has anyone looked in the lavatory?" He indicated a door diagonally opposite the office.



Dennis moved unsteadily to open it, and they could all see it was empty. So was the corresponding door on the other side of the vestibule, a linen closet. Wiese went past the office, down the dining hall corridor, unlocking doors as he went, but nothing was found. Then, dismissing the first floor nurses and stationing Dennis at the stair-foot, he moved to the second floor, keys in hand.

Left alone, Johnny Dennis collapsed, his head in his hands, fighting nausea. He was ice-cold, and, before the violence of the attack eased, he was afraid he was going to be sick.

He knew he should be worrying, figuring out what had happened, but his only thought was, "That damn restaurant! What in hell was I served that upset me like this?"

Slow steps descended the stairs, and he pulled himself erect. He could tell from the way Wiese handed back the keys that the search had been vain; from that, and the way he stood staring.

"You know, Dennis," he said after a long moment, "Parisi must have gone out of that door you claim you've been watching."

"He didn't," said Johnny thickly.

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"He's not in the building ... and that door is the only way out."

"I was there the whole time. He didn't go out!"

"Have it your own way," said Wiese.

"What are you going to do?"

"Call Richards, of course." Wiese was slow to add, "The escape of a homicidal maniac is going to be hell for the hospital—particularly if he should kill somebody. Richards isn't going to like it; he's going to take it out of somebody's hide." He said pointedly: "Yours or mine, Dennis."

He went up the stairs. Johnny stood leaning against the wall, gazing after him, while the implication drained through him.

He started to the sound of his name: "Johnny!" Miss Lewis had come silently down the corridor and stood at his side. "Are you all right?" she asked.

"Yes," said Johnny. "Sure."

But the nausea was on him again. He fought it, conscious of Miss Lewis' exclamation: "Johnny! You are sick!"

"Beat it!" he gasped. "I'm—"

She didn't go. She had him by the arm.

“Get out of here!” he choked. “For God’s sake, Kay, get out!”

## CHAPTER III

### Mr. Wiese Asks a Question

WIESE might have called Dr. Llewelyn Richards, head of Exeter Hospital, from the office, but, because his disposition was calculating, he chose to climb the stairs again, pausing before he reached the third floor to think out what had happened.

If he knew Richards, the doctor would never let responsibility for the escape rest with the hospital; there would be a scapegoat, a role David Wiese did not fancy. On the surface, Johnny Dennis was cast for the part, but Johnny's flat denial might mean further investigation which Wiese, his own position not too good, did not welcome.

True, his being with 312, his own patient, was legitimate; the fault lay in taking Jensen with him, leaving the corridor empty which was against the rules: if the night shift was so busy no one could remain in the passage, a call was supposed to be put in for extra nurses—and no call had gone in. If Richards were to quibble—

Damn Dennis! thought Wiese. Why should he deny the obvious?

Or could he be telling the truth? Was there an alternative?

Briefly, an idea had flashed through his mind to be dismissed as fantastic. It returned, and when presently

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he continued upstairs, it was in a pensive state of mind.

From the third floor he telephoned Mrs. Vreeland, on the switchboard at the Administration Building, and had her locate and put him through to Richards. He told the doctor of the escape in the briefest possible way, suggesting he come to Hughes at once.

Tom Jensen, tilted against the wall again, said, "You didn't tell the old boy enough to arouse his curiosity. He's not coming all the way from home at midnight just for that?"

"He'd come farther for less," said Wiese. "But he'll only have to walk over from the Ad. Building. He was in his office."

"In his office?" repeated Jensen. "He's working late." Wiese glanced at the clock and grunted. Jensen added, "He's like all the rest of us around here: bugs!"

The conversation died. Wiese picked up the chart of 312 on which he had been working. Jensen sat thinking of the madman wandering about the city. He caught himself listening again, anticipating now not a maniac's scream, but the terror-filled cry of Parisi's victim.

Silly, but he shivered.

The hum of the elevator rising broke the silence. Jensen's chair clicked down. Wiese shoved his chart aside with a frown.

Dr. Richards, small and excitable, came down the corridor with his rapid, nervous stride. His face was dark and lined, his sparse graying imperial gathered and spread as his thin lips worked and his arms pumped fussily. His eyes were as restless as a bird's.

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"Mr. Wiese!" he said. "Mr. Wiese! I must have misunderstood. What were you trying to say over the phone?"

Wiese offered his chair, but the doctor perched on the desk, while the nurse repeated the story in detail.

"But it's impossible!" insisted Richards. "How could he get out? Dennis would have seen him ... Dennis was on the job, wasn't he?"

"Not in the office," Wiese answered evenly. "He said he was on the steps—said he had a headache and needed air. But he says no one went out."

"You see? You can't have searched! He must still be here."

"The search was careful, sir."

"You checked broken windows, the cellar door, fire escapes?"

"That's all routine."

"Then what are you hinting? That Dennis lied?" Wiese refused to commit himself, but breathed imperceptibly easier. "H'mph!" snorted Richards. He snapped: "What's Parisi's condition? Violent?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Earlier this evening?"

"Quite all right, earlier."

"But this escape—? Does that mean—?"

"Probably!"

Richards said, "Good God!" and jumped from the desk to pace a nervous step or two down the corridor.

The attendant asked tonelessly, "Shall I call the police?"

“Police?” said Richards, as though it were a particularly unintelligent question. “Want it to get in

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the papers? Want everybody in the city to read about it? Want a panic?”

“There’ll have to be a search.”

“But privately! We can’t risk publicity—”

“Publicity.” Wiese caught the word quickly, and held it. He said, “That would be bad for the hospital.... But what do we say when Parisi kills someone and the police ask why his escape wasn’t reported?”

“Kills someone? Nonsense!”

“Nonsense?”

Their eyes met. The little doctor’s bluster collapsed. “It’s a mess!” he said.

Wiese said slowly, “There’s Louis Prescott.”

“Eh? Prescott?” The doctor’s anxious face brightened. “Why, of course—Prescott! I should have thought of him! And—let’s see—he’d be at home now; not at the station. An inspiration, Mr. Wiese!”

Wiese smiled faintly as Richards called Mrs. Vreeland and had her get him the home of Louis B. Prescott, Captain of Zenith’s police.

The Captain was slow in answering; Wiese guessed he might have been abed. Richards, shifting nervously from one foot to another, muttered to himself.

Finally the Captain’s heavy tones came over the wire.

“Louis!” Richards forgot to identify himself, but his French pronunciation of the Captain’s name was enough. “Louis! Thank God you’re home! I—Something’s happened. Something impossible’s happened. The fact is, one of my patients—is gone.... No, no! Headquarters ... I know, but this is different. It must be secret—” Apparently the Captain gave up

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the struggle, for Richards drew a breath of relief, and went on more calmly: “I can’t talk from this phone, Louis; I might be overheard. Something—” The rumbling on the other end sounded impatient. Richards said slowly, deliberately, “You must come to the hospital, Louis! ... I know the hour ... I was afraid you would be in bed. In spite of that—It will be no wild goose

chase ... It's highly important. You will agree when you hear ... Good. Thank you, Louis. I'll be in my office."

Replacing the receiver, the doctor fumbled for a handkerchief. "That was a good suggestion, Mr. Wiese," he said. "Very good. We may be able to keep this reasonably quiet. Of course, we must have the co-operation of the nurses here."

"Will you leave that to me, sir?"

"Thanks, yes! I should appreciate it, Mr. Wiese."

"Police," said Jensen, when the doctor had gone, "sound serious."

"For somebody," Wiese agreed impassively. But not for him!

Not for him, definitely aligned, now, with Richards!

Humming, he picked up 312's chart again, and presently took another from the desk drawer to compare with it. He might even, he decided, making some notes, have a second string to his bow.

"Tom," he said, "what happened tonight? The police are going to want to know, and I've been trying to figure it out. Tell me if I've got anything wrong."

"Sure."

"Parisi was here at 10:30. That's when I left him

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in 310 going to bed. Now, you were in the hall, and both Cummings and Bernstein were in 315. Right? ... I joined you, and we talked until Sylvester arrived about 10:45. He visited 315 but only stayed a minute; then he went to 312, and after that he and I spent about ten minutes getting 312 back to bed. At least it was 10:58 when we came out—I've got that on the chart. You were in the alcove then. Now, had you been away from here while we were in 312?"

"I didn't stir."

"Then Parisi was still in 310 at eleven o'clock?"

Jensen nodded. "As a matter of fact, didn't Sylvester say something to him as he went into 310?"

"I'd forgotten. He did—something about his not being abed.... Then Sylvester and Parisi were together in 310 at eleven. I was in the hall myself until almost 11:15, and neither had come out."

"Let's see!" said Jensen. "I'd gone to 311 at maybe five past eleven to answer a ring, and maybe five minutes after that Bernie relieved me."

“I hauled him out of 315,” said Wiese. “Thought he ought to take care of his own patient. You took his place in 315 with Cummings, and you were still there when 312 got up again about 11:15 and I needed help.”

“Right!” Jensen agreed. “Which makes it look as though Parisi escaped during the twenty minutes you and I were in 312.”

“Between 11:15 and 11:35,” said Wiese slowly. He studied his charts. “I wonder—” He got up suddenly and crossed to 315.

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Cummings looked up. “What now?” he asked. “More trouble?”

“No. Just wondering if you were out of this room up to the time of the search?”

“I’ll say I wasn’t! I’ve been right here since early this evening.”

“Where did you find Bernie at the start of tire search?”

“313. Why?”

Wiese pursed his lips over that, and said, “Thanks!”

He found Bernstein in 313. “Bernie,” he asked, “remember my sending you to 311 twenty-five or thirty minutes before the search?” Bernstein nodded. “Well, at the start of the search, you were in 313. You must have passed through the corridor—”

“I did. Twice. I went back to 315 and then to 313 later.”

“Good. Either time, did you see—”

“Parisi escaping?” grinned Bernstein. “No, sir. I did not.”

“I was sure of it,” said Wiese expressionlessly. “So sure I wasn’t even going to ask the question. I wanted to know if you’d seen Dr. Sylvester leaving?”

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## CHAPTER IV

### Motivation

CAPTAIN LOUIS B. PRESCOTT looked the policeman that he was. Fifty-odd years had softened his flesh, but the hard-bitten, lined, brown face, the clear green eyes, and the lantern jaw still dark with beard though his scant hair was graying kept most people from realizing that physically he had passed his prime.

His mind, like his appearance, was a policeman's, unoriginal and plodding, but thorough. Thorough, retentive, direct. Behind it lay thirty years of experience dealing with people and the things they had done, and time had not passed without his learning something of men and their ways, and acquiring some generalizations on human behavior to which, however, he always left a string of exceptions like a tail to a kite.

Being dragged from bed at midnight, dressing in clothes damp with July sultriness, and chasing across two miles of city and suburb on a summons as vague as Richards', were the unpleasant things a policeman had to put up with. Everyone thought his own run-of-the-mill troubles were "different," and a few had the knack of clothing them in an aura of mystery-like seasoning a flat dish—and it was such a meal, he suspected, that was prepared for him now.

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The weariness of a long day, the anticipation of another with a conference with the Commissioner to start it, urged him to roll back in bed and get some sleep, but there was a chance—a faint chance, as there was in every crank call—that it really was important, and it was his job to make sure. And so he called O'Reilly, on the desk at Headquarters, gave instructions for Sergeant Dugan and a couple of men to pick him up in a car, and added, with a grimace for the futility of the order, that the errand must be kept secret.

Then he dressed methodically and was ready when Dugan arrived. The Sergeant, who like his superior had grown gray in the city's service, was heavily sarcastic about the secrecy, and heartily curious about the purpose, of the night's jaunt. Prescott repeated for him the gist of Richards' call, but



refused to speculate on what lay behind it, for guessing was a waste of time.

He expected nothing more than the routine recovery of a straying patient, in spite of the trimmings Richards had given it. Still, their meeting in a tiny, crowded office brought a sense of excitement, for the doctor's nervous strain was evident.

A patient had escaped, the Captain gathered out of the jumble of relief and anxiety and explanation that spouted from the man like water from a hose. But it was different. Not like other cases the police had handled so successfully.

Prescott's knowledge of mental hospitals was slight, his abnormal psychology having been acquired solely from contact with the insane he had met in the course of his work—queer devils, twisted, confused. His chief

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feeling was thankfulness that he and those dear to him were not of their number. Beyond this, of the possibility of understanding and curing them, of the kinds and natures of their troubles, of the hospital life, he had never had occasion to learn, and why the escape of one patient was fundamentally different from the escape of another was not clear. He said as much.

"You must understand, Louis," Richards hastened to explain, "that mental institutions are no longer prisons. Most patients are allowed the run of the grounds, and if they wander off, they are—as you should know—easy to find. That kind of escape we have occasionally. But ..." He paused with a worried shake of the head. "A few would be dangerous to themselves and others if we handled them so, and for these we have built up a system of such constant observation that I should have said escape was impossible."

Prescott, who could listen to a man talk around a point for only so long, said harshly, "One has?"

"Yes," said Richards.

"What did you mean by 'dangerous'?"

"I mean the man—his name is Joseph Parisi—is homicidally inclined."

He fell silent on the phrase. Sergeant Dugan drew a deep breath, and the policemen by the door shifted slightly.

Louis Prescott's lifetime of police work had taught him what trouble was, and had given him the ability to accept most of it in a philosophically

enduring mood. But tonight the mugginess, the lateness of the hour, combining with such an announcement, gave

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him a feeling of depression. A homicidal maniac, loose in the city, meant hell for the police.

Newspaper headlines, frantic calls, requests for protection, pressure, false leads, frightened women, the actual danger. Oh, life would be sweet until they got their hands on this Parisi!

“Parisi?” he repeated aloud. “That name’s familiar.”

The Sergeant said, “Maybe you’re thinking of Big Tony, sir.”

“Joseph’s father,” said Richards. “I understood he had a police record.”

“Little things, mostly,” said Dugan. “Liquor counts ... It’s old Alibi Parisi, sir: you remember him. Slippery as what you’re trying to remember. Any time anything important happens, he’s got an alibi. It happens so often the boys gave him that for a nickname.”

“Criminally clever,” nodded the doctor. “It is part of Joseph’s unhealthy background. The whole family has a mental taint. Stephani, I recall—the second son, five or six years younger than Joseph—is effeminate, and all the children are hypochondriac.”

Prescott suggested, “How about a description, Doc?” Wasting precious moments of sleep on Big Tony and Stephani when it was Joseph who had to be found!

“Of course.” Richards fumbled through a file folder on the desk, but looked up without extracting anything. “You will work fast and secretly?” he asked. “Never forget he may attack someone.”

“I’ll have no chance to forget it,” said the Captain testily.

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The doctor was not to be hurried. It was the moment to hammer home his point. “No one is safe, Louis. Man, woman, or child. Anyone who displeases him may be killed or injured before help can come.”

“Displeases?” Prescott was caught by the triviality of the word.

“Someone bumping against him in a crowd, a waitress bringing him soup too hot, a child striking him with a rubber ball. A hundred things as casual might lead to murder! On the streets. In a store. Anywhere!”

Richards, the Captain decided, was exaggerating for effect. He shrugged.

The doctor, reading his thought, hurried on. "His admittance here was the result of an incident as slight. He and Stephani shared a room, for the Parisi, though they are well off, live in an upper story that is small accommodation for their nine children. Stephani believed—mistakenly—that he had tuberculosis, and insisted on having the window open at night, a habit to which Joseph objected one cold, mid-winter night. He insisted they hadn't blankets enough to keep warm. Stephani said he couldn't sleep in a closed room. Joseph said he'd have to. The altercation ended when Joseph seized the nearest weapon—a chair—and brought it down over his brother's skull.... Then he closed the window and went back to bed."

"Leaving his brother—"

"With a fractured skull and bleeding from a dozen cuts. Luckily Tony had heard the quarrel and investigated. Stephani was rushed to a hospital in time to save his life, but—it was close. The family doctor—

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Ferenetti—and another certified Joseph next morning ... But that's the kind of excuse on which he acts."

"I see," said Prescott slowly.

"He attacked his father once when Tony was visiting, because, he said, Tony tried to crush his hand when they shook hands. He has attacked a number of nurses for reasons increasingly irrational. Of course we keep him as isolated as possible during his periods of mania."

"He's been violent—like that—recently?"

"Well, no. He's been normal—as normal as he ever is—for several months. He was normal earlier this evening. But neither the nurse nor I would care to say what his condition is now—in view of the escape."

The Captain nodded. "Well, let's have the description. We'll work as fast as we can."

"And secretly," added Richards.

"Secretly?"

"The newspapers. Their injudicious phrases: 'maniac,' 'madman,' 'devilish cunning,' and the rest. They breed panic."

A homicidal maniac would be a field day for the papers, and there was going to be plenty of trouble for the police, but "panic" was a strong word.

"The point," Prescott said bluntly, "is not the secrecy, but the success, of the search. If we have Parisi by morning, there'll be no panic."

"But will you? Can you take the chance? Risk the publicity?"

The word, in a flash, told Prescott why he had been dragged to the hospital in the middle of the night on such a fundamentally routine matter: Richards

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wanted the escape hushed up for fear of the effect the news might have on the private hospital. The public was a secondary consideration. An excuse.

Prescott, resigned from long experience, gave up the argument: "All right. We'll try to keep the lid on tonight, but if we don't pick him up in a hurry, I won't promise. What's the description?"

Richards, satisfied, emptied the file onto the desk, and shuffled it through. "This was taken down on Joseph's admittance ten years ago, but we can make allowances. Let me see. His present age would be thirty-four. Height, five-foot-ten. Weight, 140." He paused, considering. "He was badly underweight. I imagine he's 165 or 170 now—" He fumbled for some small slips. "Yes. 164 last Saturday. A drop of four pounds from the week before —"

"What's the rest?" asked Prescott impatiently.

Richards looked up sharply. "Always the doctor, Louis; but it might have a bearing. A loss of weight not infrequently precedes a period of manic excitement."

The Captain said, "Oh!" but it failed to express the hollow sensation he felt. As a policeman he knew the importance of small things, but four pounds—! This was deep water. It had never occurred to him that a man's sanity, and other people's lives, might hang on a matter so very small.

It occurred to him that he was going to dislike the insane asylum very much.

The thought occupied him while Richards gave the rest of the description and Dugan dutifully took it down. It was a good, detailed description, and the

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Sergeant had only to ask about clothes when it was finished.

But Richards was ready. "I had the attendant on the phone," he said. "He tells me Parisi would be wearing a dark blue suit with a coat, but no vest. That may help. There won't be many dark coats these hot days. It's serge, single-breasted. He's wearing a plain white shirt and a—"

“Better phone it in,” said the Captain when Dugan had it all. “Have the word ‘dangerous’ added to police descriptions and tell O’Reilly to keep it from the reporters for the present.”

Dugan went in search of a phone, shaking his head.

Richards gave Prescott the file. “Everything we know about Parisi is there,” he said, “including references to places he used to go—where he might turn up now.”

“Good!”

“It’s ten years’ work. Take care of it!” He added, as Prescott started to rise, “There’s one other thing.” He was suddenly as nervous as he had been earlier. “If we could be—alone,” he said.

Prescott, surprised, motioned the two policemen from the room.

Richards said, “Louis ... Parisi couldn’t have escaped!”

The Captain took a moment to think it over. Then he said, “You’ve spent quite a time telling me that he did.”

“I told you that he’s gone, and he is. But he couldn’t have escaped. He was watched too carefully.”

“Then what—?”

“Perhaps he was—freed!”

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Prescott took his time over that one, too. Finally, he said, “It’s far more likely that someone was careless. Why should anyone purposely turn a lunatic loose?”

Richards shrugged slightly. “Why does anyone do anything? Surely, Louis, you’ve learned to discount motives.”

“There’s always a reason,” insisted the Captain.

“A rational one?”

“Unless you’re dealing with crazy people,” snapped Prescott irritably. “I’m talking about normal people and normal motives.”

“Nonsense! All the insane aren’t in hospitals ... And besides, insanity’s all a question of degree.” He asked sharply, “Have you ever met a man so stubborn you felt like hitting him?”

“Who hasn’t?” Prescott grinned. “Is that the way I look to you?”

“If so, I can control myself—as you could.” Richards paused, before adding, “Joseph Parisi didn’t.”

It took a moment to sink in. When it did, Prescott abandoned the argument in disgruntled haste; it wasn’t his business to quarrel on the

doctor's own ground. "Let's get back to the case," he said.

"I was illustrating the sort of motive there might be for freeing Parisi."

"You'd be assuming whoever did it was insane."

"Why not?" asked Richards. "You're dealing with an insane asylum."

Prescott was not sure what the doctor meant—surely he didn't believe a fellow patient had freed Parisi—but he refused to pry into the question, fearing another trap. Thirty years of police experience,

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he decided, were going to be of little use in a place where you started out assuming that everything and everyone was crazy.

"Anyway," concluded Richards, "Parisi is gone. It wasn't possible without someone's help."

"Whose?" Prescott was glad of firmer ground.

"One of two men. There's David Wiese, Parisi's personal attendant, a competent, unimaginative nurse. He's been with us seven years, and we've had no complaints."

"Does 'personal attendant' mean he's with Parisi constantly?"

"If Parisi is violent, yes. Recently he's handled another patient, too."

"Could he have been with this other patient when Parisi escaped?"

"He claims to have been," said Richards. "He claims all the attendants on that corridor were busy, leaving it empty. That's against rules—there are nurses on call for emergencies—but it probably happened."

"And the other man?"

"Dennis, in the office. He's pretty young, been here only two years—"

"What does he have to do with Parisi?"

Richards explained the building's plan, and how a man in the office commanded the only exit. Prescott asked about fire escapes and learned that the windows leading to them were wired; he asked about other windows and learned they were permanently set, ventilation being secured through special metal panels. He asked about service entrances, the dining

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rooms, the nurses' quarters, but Richards had an answer on every point.

"The building," he insisted, "was designed to house our most dangerous patients. These things were all foreseen."

Prescott was eventually satisfied that he was right. Joseph Parisi could have left only one way, and Dennis should have seen him.

“And Dennis,” said Richards, “flatly denies Parisi went out.”

“How far away is the lavatory?” asked Prescott slowly.

“No distance at all. It’s diagonally across the foyer.”

“Um! ... Even so, it’s conceivable, isn’t it, that Parisi left the third floor when all the nurses were busy, and crossed the foyer while Dennis was there?”

“You’re straining the laws of coincidence,” said Richards stiffly.

The Captain nodded. “I’ll talk with Wiese first,” he said.

Before they left the building he sent Dugan to Headquarters to take charge of the search, and with him one of the policemen to bring back the car. The other, a man named Lynch, stayed, and they both followed Richards across the dark, tree-shaded grounds to the new, pink-brick facade of Hughes Hall. Lynch was left on the steps outside.

A big, raw-boned young fellow was in the vestibule. He was strikingly pale, but the face and figure seemed familiar to Prescott, though he could not place them at the moment.

Richards said to him sharply, “You belong in the office, Dennis!”

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“I’ve been sick, sir,” the boy protested. “The office was so hot, I was afraid to go back. I need the air.”

Richards grunted and led the way to the elevator. Prescott, crossing the foyer, checked the impression he had from Richards’ description with the actuality.

It occurred to him that, for the first time (his occasional visits to the Administration Building scarcely counted) he was inside an insane asylum, surrounded by madmen. What he had expected, he could not say, but certainly not the queer, absolute silence that reigned here. He recognized the artificial quiet of sound-proof construction, but it was a rationalization that made no allowance for the tense expectancy, as though the place were waiting for something; were waiting, he realized, suddenly, for the thing that should be there: the scream of the maniac.

Imagination, he decided, but the eerie feeling clung to him.

Richards piloted the elevator to the third floor and led the way down the corridor to 310.

“This was Parisi’s room,” he said.

It was a pleasant room with comfortable furniture, gay spreads, small homely touches. Warmly lighted by shaded wall brackets, it was possibly a

little too neat, too precise, but there was nothing of the hospital about it, certainly nothing of the prison. It was homelike, cooler and more comfortable than Prescott's own bedroom.

He started to push an armchair to a different angle to sit down. It stuck. He took two hands to it, and then dropped it as though an electric shock had hit him. The chair was bolted to the floor. All the furniture was bolted to the floor. Nothing heavy, he saw,

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was loose: the lamp was secured, even the bookends. There was no free glass, nothing that could be turned into a club or a cutting edge.

Prescott took a grip on himself. Not even Richards' story had brought home the vivid reality of Joseph Parisi as this room did. Madness and violence were implicit in its silent restraint.

"Wiese must be next door," said Richards. "I'll get him."

The Captain chose to follow.

Richards opened the door of 312, and Prescott, over his shoulder, saw a shambles. Curtains, chair-covers, bedspread and bedding lay in shredded strips all over the room; toilet articles were smashed; bureau drawers had been emptied and their contents frenziedly scattered; the walls and floors were smeared with filth, and in the midst of it, under the pitiless ceiling light, an elderly, gray-haired man crawled on a disemboweled mattress, on all fours, naked.

One silvered cowlick hung across his face; his lips were slack and wet, and there was lecherous anticipation in his eyes. Prescott was to remember other things—the mole on the old man's side, the colorless hair running down his thighs to his knees, the flabby, pendulous belly—details that registered with photographic clarity. He would remember, too, the sidewise, crab-like movement incredibly swift with which the man caught one of the white-coated attendants circling him, pinned him to the mattress with the weight of his body, and began kissing him slobberingly on the mouth and throat.

Disgusted, Prescott went back to 310 and its rigid furniture.

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## CHAPTER V

### The Problem of Dr. Sylvester

RICHARDS joined him presently. "Wiese knows were here," he said. "He'll be out as soon as he can."

Prescott had stumbled on a side of the doctor's business that an outsider rarely saw, and Richards was embarrassed. There was an uncomfortable silence. The Captain wondered if he was imagining things, or if sounds carried through the heavy partitions.

Which of the nurses had been Wiese? And what kind of men did it take to handle degeneration day in, day out, and stay sane themselves? Richards' cryptic remark, "You're dealing with an insane asylum!" took on a sudden meaning.

Time crawled. It was ten minutes before they heard a door open, and David Wiese came to 310 on silent feet. He was the attendant the patient in 312 had caught.

Prescott wasted no time in getting down to business. Because Parisi's condition had been bothering him ever since he had heard about the four pounds, he asked about it, and definitely, though from no specific reaction, he got the impression that Wiese was taken aback. The reply, at least, was evasive.

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"He was merely hypomaniac earlier this evening, sir."

"Merely what?"

"Hypomaniac: his usual condition," said Wiese in his flat tone. "Unwarrantable cheerfulness, aggressive familiarity, loud-mouthed, boastful behavior." He added, gratuitously, "Acute mania is when this mood deepens, and he becomes irritable, insulting and explosive. The slightest thing can touch off a fury of violence, then."

Prescott skipped the technicalities and summarized: "Then earlier tonight, he was just normal?"

"He was merely hypomaniac," said Wiese.

"Dr. Richards tells me his losing weight might indicate an attack. Were there any other symptoms?"

"Yes. Several."

Richards said sharply, "I hadn't heard."

"His sleep has been disturbed. Yesterday and today his language was highly colored." He added other details. The symptoms did not impress the Captain. There was no mention of aches or pains, and insomnia and bad language were nothing to get excited over. But Richards seemed anxious.

"Considering all this," said Prescott when the doctor had finished, "and the escape, you'd imagine Parisi was violent now?"

"I didn't say that," said Wiese.

"Would you be surprised to learn that he was?"

"No."

Wiese was slippery, and had had his way long enough.

Prescott said, "I understand you were supposed to watch Parisi?"

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There was an undertone of insinuation Wiese could scarcely have missed, but he twisted the question to his own ends: "I have been Mr. Parisi's attendant for seven years, sir."

"How could you miss seeing him leave the building tonight?"

The man said evenly, "I was watching the gentleman in 312—also my job. He's been—ah—busy for two hours or more, as you saw."

"When did you last see Parisi?"

"In his room at 10:30. I'd been with him for an hour, but he wanted to go to bed, so I left him to it." Wiese hesitated perceptibly, and added, "He didn't, though."

"How do you know?"

"Dr. Sylvester went to his room about eleven," said the nurse deliberately. "Just before he closed the door, I heard him say, Well, Joe, I expected to find you abed!"

"Dr. Sylvester?"

Richards said, "Dr. Herbert Sylvester, a brilliant young research man working under my personal direction and accomplishing some remarkable things in the way of diagnosis."

"What was he doing here at eleven o'clock at night?"

"He visits patients at all hours," Richards explained. "Parisi was one of the three on this floor with whom he was experimenting."

"How long was he with Parisi, Mr. Wiese?"

"I didn't see him leave." Flatly.

"Did anyone else visit 310?"

“Not that I know of.”

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“Then Sylvester seems to have been the last to see him before his escape. Can we get in touch with him?”

“Of course.” Richards’ face was clouded. “He’s probably returned to his rooms by this time, but I’ll ring his office to make sure.”

He went into the hall, reluctantly.

“Why didn’t you see Sylvester leave, Mr. Wiese?”

“I was with the gentleman in 312.”

“He seems to have occupied most of your evening,” snapped Prescott. “Who else might have seen Sylvester go?”

“Any of the nurses in the corridor. But they didn’t. I asked.”

The answer was revealing. If Wiese had asked the others specifically about Sylvester’s departure, he must believe—or want Prescott to believe—that Sylvester was involved in the escape.

Richards, returning at this moment, added to the suspicion: “Sylvester’s not in his laboratory or his office, Louis, and Mrs. Vreeland tells me he hasn’t returned from his rounds.”

“Does he visit patients all night?” asked Prescott, glancing at his watch. “Would he leave without going to his office?”

“He wouldn’t go home in his coverall, I’m sure. But it is late!” The little doctor was disturbed.

“We’ll look him up in a minute,” Prescott said grimly.

Wiese, now that Sylvester’s name was on the record, was willing to be specific. He gave the Captain a precise account of everything from 10:30 on, as he had figured it out.

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Prescott listed pertinent times in his notebook, checked with the other nurses, and then went downstairs to talk with Dennis.

Richards took them to a consultation room, a clinically bare little cubicle a short way down the corridor to the women’s wing, which he said would be cooler and less crowded for their interview than the office. They left Lynch in the foyer in Dennis’ place.

In Prescott’s experience, interest in a case rarely sprang full-fledged. Like many another man, he worked because work was his bread and butter, and too often the prospect of one more job seemed the last straw. But, at

some time in every investigation, as is true of anyone who does his work well, warmth and urgency replaced mechanical routine, and such a moment had arrived now, born of a combination of pity for Dennis—the boy was so pale he might have been sick—and a sudden conviction that he had nothing to do with Parisi's escape, a hunch which, in the face of facts, was a little ridiculous.

Prescott never trusted hunches.

Still, when they had all found seats, his questioning began sympathetically. Johnny Dennis did little to bolster the hunch, however, for it was clear from the start that he had changed his story.

Asked if there were any way Parisi could have gone without being seen, he answered that it was possible if he had sneaked out during one of the times he had been sick in the lavatory. Looking at him, Prescott could easily believe he had been sick, but the statement failed to jibe with his earlier flat denial that Parisi could have escaped.

"When did this sickness start?" Prescott asked.

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"About two hours ago—or two and a half. A little before eleven, it was." A long time for a stomach upset to last, the Captain thought.

"Can anyone bear you out?"

Johnny, he could have sworn, was on the verge of shaking his head. But he didn't. He didn't do or say anything for a full minute, and his restless eyes—unnaturally dark—sought the corners of the room. Then he said, "Miss Lewis knows."

Prescott glanced at Richards. "A nurse in the first floor women's wing," said the doctor. "I'll find her."

He went out. The Captain sat looking at Johnny Dennis, wondering. If the boy had anyone to corroborate his story, why had he hesitated?

Richards, returning presently, brought Kay Lewis. Prescott never read women with the accuracy that he did men, and was not surprised to learn later that he overestimated her age by a good deal. He had reason. He had met women before with that hard coating of perfection, hiding thought and emotion under serenity of feature and groomed preciseness of appearance, and he knew it rarely developed in youth. It was the armor of the unhappy woman. He did not at once perceive that it might also be the armor of the sensitive against unpleasant things, but when he did, remembering the

people she worked with, he understood how such a shell had grown around a girl of twenty-six.

At the moment, he was more interested in the way Johnny Dennis tried to get her attention than in the woman herself. Johnny was trying to give her a message, making little counter-clockwise motions with his finger. Miss Lewis, meeting his eyes, missed them.

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Prescott said hastily, "Mr. Dennis has been sick. You knew?"

"Yes."

"When?" He added, "Please don't look at Mr. Dennis."

He held her eyes, but could feel them straining toward the boy, and she hesitated a long time.

"About an hour and a half ago. Maybe a little more."

She looked at Dennis swiftly, but he had turned away. He had lied, and in his anxiety to prove his lie, had gambled. And had lost.

"How did you know about it, Miss Lewis?"

"It was during the course of the search." She stopped dead, evidently aware of Johnny's silent protest at every word she spoke. But she had no choice. She continued: "Mr. Wiese told us of the escape, and we made a search. When it was over, I went to the foyer with Miss Stilles to report. Johnny was there. He looked awful."

"In what way?"

"He was white. His eyes were queer—they still are—and he acted as though his stomach hurt him. He said he wasn't feeling well, but that it was all right. I was worried. I went back later to make sure."

"How much later?"

"Five minutes, maybe. The search was over, and Mr. Wiese was still talking to him at the foot of the stairs. When he went, Johnny was sick. He was angry at my trying to help, but—"

Richards asked, "Was this the first time he had vomited?"

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"Yes, doctor. And ... I thought it was off-color—greenish—"

"Oh, for Pete's sake!" exclaimed Johnny Dennis.

Prescott hung to the point. "Then, if you were sick for the first time after the search was over, Mr. Dennis, how could Parisi have escaped while you were sick?"

Miss Lewis drew a sharp breath as she saw what she had done. The boy said sullenly, "I had cramps first—a long while before." "You're lying, of course," said Prescott. "Shielding someone." "No, sir. I was sick, and I still am."

Shielding someone was a guess—one possibility. He might have freed Parisi himself; he might have been out of the office for a dozen reasons, but it would do for a working theory. Who?

It could be reached from another angle.

His impression that he had known Johnny Dennis before, had crystallized into a knowledge of where and when. He said, "You went to the University here, didn't you, Dennis? Played end on the football team?"

"Yes, sir." Johnny grinned boyishly. "Regularly my last two years. But that was four years ago. I'm surprised you remember."

"How did you happen to go to the University? Local man?"

"It was my father's school. No, I come from a farm in Ohio."

"Then why stay in Zenith after graduation?"

"I guess life on a farm didn't mean much to me."

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I thought I could get work here, and move to New York some day. It didn't turn out."

"How did you get your job here?"

Prescott was working toward the subject of the hospital's personnel, but here, unexpectedly, when a simple answer about application was anticipated, he got what he wanted.

Johnny Dennis stumbled over the question. After a pause that was patently surprise, he said, "Why—a friend helped me get it."

And Dr. Richards, nodding, said, "I gave it to him at the request of Dr. Sylvester."

Richards clipped off the sentence as though he wanted to take it back. Johnny wet his lips. Miss Lewis made an almost imperceptible movement. And Prescott was aware of rising tension.

"Sylvester?" he repeated. "Friend of yours, Dennis?"

"Yes, sir." Clipped, and brief.

"Know him well?"

There was no answer.

Richards cleared his throat. "Dr. Sylvester and Mr. Dennis are very close friends," he said. "They went through the University together, and I believe

they room together in the city. But I'd like to state that I'm sure Dr. Sylvester had nothing to do with this."

"No?" said Prescott. "Then why is Dennis shielding him?"

It was Miss Lewis who said, "I hope you aren't serious about this, Captain. Bert wouldn't have anything to do with the escape, I know."

"That's true," nodded Richards, quickly. "I have the greatest confidence in him, and I'm sure he

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would do nothing to the discredit of the hospital."

The woman's coolness was cracking. "Bert wasn't the kind to turn a madman loose! He knew them. He couldn't have done a deliberately terrible thing like that!"

Prescott got out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "All right!" he said wearily. "You're all for him. Dennis is his best friend, the doctor's his sponsor, and you, Miss Lewis, act as though his interests were yours, but —"

"They are, Captain," she told him. "I'm Bert's fiancée."

Prescott got heavily to his feet. "Look!" he said. "I've no prejudice against the guy. All I know is he was the last to see Parisi, and Dennis is shielding him. Now what's the story? Give me a break, and I'll give him one."

Dennis was stubbornly silent.

Kay Lewis went down beside him. "Johnny, I don't know what happened, but tell it—no matter what it was! I can't fight in the dark, and I want to fight!"

Dennis shook his head. "I'm afraid."

"You know what Bert means to me, don't you? Let's fight it out together. Dr. Richards will fight with us. What was it, Johnny?"

Reluctantly, he told her: "He sent me for a prescription. That was all—except that, while I was gone, Parisi got away."

"That was all!" Richards exploded incredulously. "By God, I'd say it was enough! You mean you actually left the building? You went off and left your job to—"

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Prescott cut in: "Let's have it from the beginning, Dennis."

“Bert came in about 10:25,” Johnny said. “He visited his patients on this floor and the second, and then came down to ask me if I’d run an errand. I told him, Sure, if he’d stay in the office. I was glad to get out. The night’s been awful hot, and I had a headache. He gave me a prescription for that, too, when I mentioned it.”

Prescott was figuring in his notebook. “When was it you left the building?”

“About a quarter to eleven.”

“And Sylvester was in your office then? ... Wiese tells me he reached the third floor at a quarter to eleven, so he must have gone up as soon as you were out of the way.”

Kay Lewis asked quietly, “How long were you gone, Johnny?”

“Quite a while. It’s almost a mile to the drugstore, and I remember it was a couple of minutes past eleven when I got there. It took the man a long while to make the prescriptions—ten or fifteen minutes. Then I stopped outside to take the headache remedy, and to top that, I got sick before I got back.”

“You were sick before you reached the hospital?” Prescott broke in. “How long after taking that medicine?”

“Ten—almost fifteen minutes. I was on the grounds. It was an awful cramp that doubled me up so I had to sit on a bench for five or ten minutes before I could go on.”

“When did you get back?”

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“Just as Wiese came down with news of the escape. Of course I wondered where Bert was. I wanted to talk to him before I said anything. Only now I suppose you’ll be after him.”

“Well,” said Prescott mildly, “he’s certainly the next to talk to.”

He went over Johnny’s story in careful detail. The medicine interested him particularly. Sylvester ...

The Captain followed a perturbed Richards into the corridor and down it to the foyer. Kay Lewis stood in the hall, looking after them, and Johnny, following them, crossed slowly toward his office. The hospital was so silent the butting of the moth against the ceiling over Lynch’s head was clearly audible. Prescott shivered. He was glad to be leaving the place: glad that his brief contact with madmen was over. Lynch fell in behind,



unimpressible, stolid. Johnny Dennis opened his office door, and said, "God!" in a voice so quiet that for an instant it failed to register.

Then Prescott whirled. Johnny, leaning against the jamb, was staring into the office. Prescott reached his side before Richards, but the doctor was quicker in going to his knees beside the twisted figure on the floor. It lay on one shoulder, knees drawn high, one hand clenched across its chest.

Richards felt for a pulse, and for five seconds they waited in the silent hospital. Then Richards said, whispering, "He's dead."

Kay Lewis came so silently that Prescott had no chance to stop her. She saw what there was to see. She said, "Bert!" in a voice like a hurt child.

And then the scream Hughes Hall had been waiting

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for all evening echoed down its corridors as she cried the name again.

And after that Kay Lewis' knees buckled beneath her and she pitched forward across the inert body of Dr. Herbert Sylvester.

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## CHAPTER VI

### Trouble

JOHNNY DENNIS carried Miss Lewis away, but as Richards made to follow, the Captain detained him. "You're sure he's dead?" he asked.

"Some while. You want a—further examination of—ah—" The sentence drained off half-heartedly.

"My own man'll look him over. He's dead. He won't mind waiting."

A grim joke, bringing sharp anger to Richards' shoe-button eyes. Prescott was on familiar ground now, dealing with things that had been his life's work, but the doctor, feeling events swept out of his hands, knowing that violent death on the heels of Parisi's escape was a catastrophe for the hospital, thought levity misplaced. He set off after Dennis without a word.

Prescott was cataloging the things to be done: "Lock this place up ... Get on the phone to O'Reilly ... Fingerprints ... medical examiner ... photographers ... Keep people away ... Where the hell is everybody, anyway?"

There had been no response to the scream, though it must have been heard throughout the first floor at least, and, as the fact impressed itself upon him, he stood listening, puzzled. The silence was almost oppressive.

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Suddenly the Captain shivered, realizing the explanation: in a mental hospital, screams were normal; they meant only that a patient was suffering again.

For the second time, Prescott paused to wonder what kind of people worked here that a woman's cry meant nothing. If they wouldn't answer that, could they be counted on to react normally at all?

It was a question disturbing to a man who dealt in generalities, in the normal reactions of normal people, and it needed a deliberate effort to get back to the work in hand.

There was a telephone in the office, but it was wiser not to use it when there were others in the attendants' alcoves. He paused to lock the office door and set Lynch on guard. Then he turned into the right wing. The left, he remembered, was the women's, and he had no desire to stumble into anything embarrassing.

The attendant in the alcove glanced up, and at sight of a stranger got to his feet. Prescott asked for use of the phone, and in a few minutes was connected with O'Reilly.

"Is Dugan back?" he asked without preliminary.

"Yes, sir. He's working. Should I put him on?"

"No. Tell him to chuck it. Tell him we got trouble and to get the hell up here as fast as he can drive."

"Where, sir?"

"Hey? Oh—at the hospital. Tell him. I'll hold the wire."

The attendant said, "What's happened?"

Prescott turned and looked at him. He was a fleshy young fellow, with a pink and white complexion,

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chubby cheeks, and oiled hair. He spoke silkily, in a fashion Prescott disliked in a man.

"Was it that woman screaming?" the other asked. "Who was it?"

"One of the nurses."

"Miss Lewis?" The chubby cheeks remained pinkly bland as Prescott nodded. The Captain wondered how he had guessed so accurately. The young man asked, "Hurt?"

O'Reilly picked up the receiver at that moment, and said, "Okay! He's on the way with a couple of men."

"Good! Now listen, because I only want to say this once! Call Doc Smith and tell him we've a corpse for him. Get him out of bed. We can't do anything until he gets here. Call Willie Krutz and chase him down here with his fingerprint outfit, and get in touch with the photographers. Tell 'em to come jumping. I don't want to wait all night!"

"Yes, sir. What about this maniac? If he did it, we'd better put someone on his trail in place of Dugan."

Prescott's reply stuck in his throat. Parisi! Not since the discovery of the body had he thought of this obvious connection. He said, "Put Hallahan on it."

"Sure," said O'Reilly, "and is all this to be secret, too?"

"Huh! Fat chance!"

"I was goin' to say, if it was, you'd better get a good story, because the reporters was out of here on Dugan's heels so fast it looked like a magician's trick!"

Prescott, hanging up, heard the attendant ask, “Who’s the corpse? Not Miss Lewis?” The voice was quite unworried.

“Who in hell are you?” demanded Prescott.

“Me? I’m Mat Loomis.”

“Kind of anxious about Miss Lewis, aren’t you?”

“You said she screamed. Why shouldn’t I wonder if she’d been hurt—or anything?”

“Related to her?”

“Related? No—of course not!”

“Friend? ... Not more than a friend, I trust?”

“That’s hardly your business.”

“Knew she was engaged to someone else, didn’t you?”

“Sure.”

“Well,” said Prescott, getting up, “that someone else is the corpse.”

Young Loomis’ face remained as bland as before, and if the Captain’s announcement had altered it in any way, it was only to add an expression that missed being a smile by a hair.

Returning to the foyer, Prescott sent Lynch down to the drive to intercept and direct those who would be arriving shortly. Then he unlocked the office door, and, after a moment’s hesitation, transferred the key and relocked it from the inside. The idea of a lunatic sneaking up on him while he was busy did not appeal to him.

The office was about twelve or thirteen feet to a side and almost square. Two walls were cement—plaster, green-tinted, blank and windowless; the other two consisted of wooden partitions rising about four feet from the floor, topped with glass for a similar

distance above. The projecting corner was cut diagonally and contained a grill, beneath which was a stool and a counter that served as a desk. Against the side wall, not quite opposite the door, was a small, flat-topped desk, and the swivel chair behind it was set so that a person seated could look out through the open doorway and see the elevator and a part of the stairs. The desk had the usual office equipment, including a spindle with a couple of notes stuck on the shaft. In the corner of the room behind the door was a

stack of metal files. One drawer was open six or eight inches revealing filing envelopes bulging with papers. There was a straight chair.

Dr. Herbert Sylvester lay between the desk, which he faced, and the wooden partition, his head inches from the stool, and his shoes perhaps three feet from the door.

Prescott did not move until he was sure he had the picture. He had little faith in clues: people were what counted; but he believed in being thorough. If this were a madman's crime, the murderer might have left some trace. But the gray-tiled floor was bare, and, aside from the figure on the floor, and some bloodstains on the corner of the desk, there was no sign of violence. It didn't look like a madman's crime.

He knelt beside the body, moving the hand that lay clutched on the chest. The arm was stiffening, the hand full of drying blood. The front of the doctor's coverall was soaked with it, and there was a lot on the floor. By leaning far forward and exploring cautiously with his fingers, he found the wound,

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small and narrow with little lips. A knife wound. And more than one from the look of it.

Prescott fished for his handkerchief, and wiped his soiled fingers. His wife wouldn't like that, but it couldn't be helped.

He looked around for the weapon, moving the body slightly, feeling underneath it, but the knife did not seem to be there.

Then he took a moment to consider the man who was dead. Sylvester had been a man under thirty, above medium height, and remarkably thin. He was all bones, long, thin, brittle bones with no strength in them, and his flesh was scant and stringy. The head, in death, already suggested a skull, with his prominent jaw line accented by hollow cheeks and deep eye-sockets. All this was at odds with the conception he had formed of the man. From the descriptions he had heard, he had expected to meet quite a fellow in Herbert Sylvester, but the body before him was that of a bookish person he would not have cared much for in life.

Somebody tried the handle of the door, and Prescott looked up sharply. Mat Loomis came around to the grill and peered in. "It is Sylvester, isn't it!" he said, as though he had doubted it.

"What's the idea of trying the door?"

"I thought I'd come in. But it was locked."

“I know. Now suppose you scuttle back to yOur end of the hall, and let me have a few minutes alone.”

Loomis gave him a queer smile and walked away. Had that been natural curiosity, or something else? Prescott wondered.

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He got to his feet and looked at the bloodstains on the desk. They were concentrated in one spot and suggested that Sylvester had clung there a few seconds, stricken, before collapsing. Then he had fallen, gathering himself into the hunched, hurt posture of the unborn. Minute scrutiny revealed no other stains anywhere in the room.

Prescott went to the grill and looked at the book that lay open beneath it. The entries recorded the arrivals and departure of all who had come to Hughes. The last two entries read: “10:25—Dr. Sylvester to call on his patients.” “10:40—Dr. Lownds left.” They were in a square, uncertain hand: Johnny Dennis’ work, evidently. He had made only eight entries in all, starting with one at 6:15.

Prior to that a thin, spidery writing that looked feminine, but might not have been, recorded multitudinous movements by visitors, doctors, nurses, and patients.

Study proved that no outsiders, barring Sylvester, had been in the building after Dr. Lownds’ departure at 10:40; but, if the murder had not occurred until 11:15 or later, this was scarcely vital.

Of the two notes stuck on the desk spindle, the first was in Johnny’s handwriting: “Dr. Thomas: Call to see Miss Christian’s patient. She has been using dirty language all day, and Miss C is afraid she may not sleep. Wants a sedative.” The other, in the spidery hand, was briefer: “Have Dr. Thomas get in touch with Dr. Anderson if he comes in before ten.” Apparently Dr. Thomas had not come in, or, if he had, had not received his messages.

Prescott got out his handkerchief, folded the

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bloodied place inside, and opened the desk drawers. A man’s desk, without neatness or order, of which Dugan could make an inventory later with Johnny’s help. The Captain turned to the metal file, and looked through the accumulated data on two or three patients near the front of the open drawer.

They seemed to have no bearing, but he was still busy with them when Dugan arrived.

“Holy Mother!” said the Sergeant when Prescott had unlocked the door. “It looks like murder! So that’s Parisi!”

“Wrong, Sergeant. This is a fellow by the name of Sylvester. We haven’t found Parisi.”

“But we want him for murder!” exclaimed the Sergeant, leaping, with O’Reilly’s ease, the gap that had escaped Prescott.

“We’ll talk that out,” said the Captain doubtfully. Briefly, he brought Dugan up to date with an account of Richards’ suspicions, his interviews with Wiese, Dennis, and Miss Lewis. “In view of all that,” he finished, “what does it look like to you, Sergeant?”

“Well, sir, like this Sylvester let Parisi loose and was smacked for his trouble.”

“Stabbed,” corrected Prescott. “And where would Parisi get a knife?”

Dugan shrugged. “The little doc might know.”

This theory that both O’Reilly and Dugan had plunged for, that Parisi was the murderer—the only logical theory, Prescott admitted—rang false for the Captain, and he was struggling to put his doubt into words. It was hard.

“Sergeant ... you were in Lackner County that

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time the maniac killed his wife and family. What did the place look like? Like this?”

“It looked like hell,” said the Sergeant succinctly. “Lousy with blood, the bodies hacked to pieces, things ripped—”

“Not exactly like this?” repeated the Captain.

“No, sir. Of course, Parisi might not have had time.”

“I’ve a hunch time wouldn’t mean much to these people,” said Prescott. “I’d guess a lunatic would have time for whatever he wanted. If Parisi had had a killing streak, he’d probably have smashed the chair, torn up the papers—”

“He mighta done in the chair,” said the literal Sergeant. “You remember what the doc said about his hitting his brother. But he just climbed back in bed after he’d done it; he didn’t start ripping things up.”

Prescott realized he wasn’t being very brilliant, while his Sergeants were putting their fingers on vital points right and left. “You’re right,” he said.

“I’m confusing Parisi with—someone else. I was thinking they were all alike, but they aren’t, naturally. Parisi hit his brother with a chair and went to bed. I suppose it’s a parallel if he stuck a knife into Sylvester and walked away. But that doesn’t explain the knife.”

The Sergeant had dealt his theory a body blow, but the Captain was clinging to the wreckage.

Lynch appeared at the grill. “There’s a mob of reporters out here,” he said. “What’ll I tell ’em?”

“You keep your mouth shut,” snapped Prescott. “I’ll be out!” He added to Dugan, “There’s another

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thing ... You’ve been around, Sergeant. Have you ever seen a woman faint?”

“Faint?” said Dugan, looking blank.

“The Brooke Street fire—that time Ed Damiani was killed. Didn’t you take the news to his wife? What happened?”

“Well, when I’d convinced her I wasn’t kiddin’, she acted like a prizefighter that’s been knocked silly. She didn’t pass out, if that’s what you mean.” He added, “What’s the point?”

Prescott explained slowly, thinking it out as he went along: “I saw a woman faint tonight, Dugan. I’ve been in this game quite a while, and I haven’t seen an honest-to-God faint in I don’t know when. I’m not sure I’ve seen it now ... It was this fellow’s girl,” he added, indicating the body. “She came in here running, stopped inside the door, and stared. Then she called his name—twice or three times, I’m not sure which—and then she fainted. What do you think?”

“Phony?” But it was a question, not an answer.

“I wish I knew. I can’t figure women, worse luck.”

“Who can?” said Dugan. He said, looking at Sylvester, “It musta been a shock.”

“More than your telling the Damiani girl about her husband?”

“She’s tough,” said Dugan. “And then—seeing the body—”

“Yes, damn it! That’s the worst of it! It’s possible! ... But then, I don’t know. You see—these nurses are pretty tough, too. They’ve seen—quite a lot ... Anyway, my wife says women have more nerve than

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men—than you, Sergeant. What would you say to that?”

“Well,” Dugan grinned. “It’s a long time since I fainted, Captain.”

“Right!” But Prescott was still fiddling with the point when he turned away. “I’m going to ask a woman,” he said.

The officer appeared at the grill, and Prescott barked at him before he had a chance to speak: “I’m coming, Lynch, coming! Tell those damn reporters to contain themselves!”

## CHAPTER VII

### The Lady Who Heard Voices

PRESCOTT interviewed a little group of reporters on the steps outside Hughes. He mentioned the murder, admitted to mystification, said a knife was the lethal weapon, that there was no motive, and no woman. He let them gather that he had only just arrived and might be able to tell them more after he'd looked around. He suggested that Mrs. Vreeland could give them some dope on Sylvester, and congratulated himself as they went off on having avoided mention of Parisi. His success was short-lived. Jerry Keenan, reporter on the evening local, had lingered.

"You'd better go look up Sylvester," said the Captain.

"Know all about him," Keenan returned. "Went to the U with him, roomed in the same building. Wrote a special feature on him six months ago—local celeb, and all that. What I'm interested in is—how did you get word of this?"

"Telephone." Prescott was trying to be wary.

"I knew it couldn't have been cross-country runners," said the reporter. "Who telephoned?"

"Dr. Richards."

"Yes? And when?" Prescott hesitated over his answer, and Jerry smiled. "More than a half hour ago,

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wasn't it? Thought you let the boys jump to conclusions. Nearer midnight, perhaps?"

"About," said Prescott resignedly. Here went the kite!

Keenan said with satisfaction, "You called the station. O'Reilly kept saying 'sir,' which isn't his nature. Then Dugan deliberately threw us off, and that was funny, too. Then general orders for a search went out." Prescott nodded, waiting for the conclusion. "Sylvester, I guess," Keenan said. "He'd disappeared. Then you did a little looking on your own hook, and found him—dead. Now what's the story? Why did Richards think he'd disappeared? How long has he been missing?"

Prescott thought, By God, one break, anyway!

He said swiftly, "I haven't got to the bottom of it myself, Jerry. Your paper doesn't go to bed for eight hours—I'll give you a story before then. But—keep it quiet."

He went into the building and Jerry Keenan kicked the stone step in disgust. Damn! he thought. Won't I ever learn to keep still? They were looking for somebody, but not Sylvester! Now who—?

Prescott called Mrs. Vreeland from Mat Loomis' alcove and warned her against mentioning Parisi. She had Richards' instructions, but there was no harm hammering the point home.

Returning to the foyer, he met Doc Smith. The medical examiner was an untidy fat man whose flesh hung in sacks beneath his eyes, sagged at the cheeks, and flopped in a melancholy dewlap under his chin. Tobacco juice stained the white bristles of his day-and-a-half beard, his shirt was limp and soiled, and

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his capacious trousers drooped from ancient suspenders.

"Hello, Doc," said Prescott. "Quite a time since I've rooted you out like this."

Doc Smith's voice was heavy and booming. "Too hot to sleep, anyway. Besides, it makes me feel young again to get up before dawn. Time was—" he paused, set his bag down, and hunted for a half-smoked cigar—"time was when I resented getting up, but I get lonesome. You boys don't keep me busy ... Where's the body?"

"In the coop. He was stabbed."

Doc Smith grunted and lighted his cigar. "Know all about it, eh? I won't even have the fun of telling you!"

"No, but you're in on the excitement anyway, Doc."

The old man waddled around to the door, and got down laboriously beside the dead man. "He's been here some time, Louis. He's as stiff as a cheese."

"Between eleven and half-past—how's that?"

"Good." Doc got up again, and stood, arms akimbo, staring at the body. "Lots of blood, ain't there?"

"Look, Doc, I'm going to wander around. Wait for the photographers before you move him much. And don't touch anything. I'll want to see you before you go."

"Sure! Go along. I'll amuse myself here."

Prescott wanted a talk with Richards. The doctor had disappeared into the women's wing, and the Captain hesitated, wondering what the proprieties were, but decided to risk it. There was a nurse in the

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alcove, but before he reached it, a door opened, and another appeared, turning towards him.

The shock of meeting a friend in an insane asylum is understandable, even if she isn't a patient.

"Good Lord!" said Prescott. "Miss James!"

The girl said, "Well, Captain Prescott. Fancy meeting you here!"

Louis Prescott thought of Miss Leslie James as a friend, but he really knew little about her. His friendship had been with her father, old Bill James, who, about the time Prescott was pounding a beat, had started at the linen mills, and had ended by owning them and a good portion of the city's wealth. Theirs had been a hard-handed acquaintance that had extended only casually to their families, though the Captain knew and admired comfortable, hard-working Addie who had come all the way with Bill but who would never get used to money, and their daughter, Leslie, who, brought up in luxury, was still, he thought, a worthy successor to both.

"You look as though you worked here," he said.

"I do. You wouldn't let that good nurse's training I had go to waste, would you?" Miss James added, "You're roughly the hundredth person who's been surprised to find me here, and I'm beginning to resent the implication that I'm rich, idle, and useless."

"Any other job! But this—"

There was a smile of amusement on her lips. "Nobody understands. But you'll excuse me. I'm looking for Dr. Richards. About a patient."

"I'm looking for him, too. What's your trouble?"

"Oh—the woman insists upon seeing someone with authority. She's sensed there's something wrong, as

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patients will, and she's got 'something important' she wants to tell."

"If anyone's got information, I want it. Take me in."

"She really doesn't know anything, you know. Patients get foolish ideas. I only thought she'd get to sleep quicker if Dr. Richards would listen to her a minute."

“I’ll listen to her.”

“Do you think you should? I mean—after all, you don’t understand patients. I wouldn’t want you to take anything Mrs. Windowmore said too seriously. Besides, Dr. Richards wouldn’t like it.”

“I’ll tell him I bullied you,” said Prescott.

She hesitated a moment more, and then, with a disquieting quirk at the corners of her mouth, re-opened the door. A woman was sitting up in bed, a pink kimono pulled around her shoulders, an elderly, gray-haired, rather beautiful old lady with a dignity quite out of place there.

She said, “Who is this, dear? I asked for someone in authority. This isn’t a doctor.”

“I’m Captain Prescott of the Police, ma’am.”

“Police! Then I was right! I knew something was very wrong. I’m so sensitive, and after what I heard tonight, I was sure something dreadful would happen. What was it?”

Prescott, sensing information, and unaware that these things were kept from patients, said bluntly, “One of the doctors has been killed, ma’am. A Dr. Sylvester.”

“Oh, no!” She seemed genuinely horrified. “I can’t

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believe it! Why, only this morning he was here. Such a nice young man.”

“You knew him?”

“I should say so, Captain Prescott! Why, he’s seen me three times a day for the past two years. I knew him as well as the hospital bill of fare!”

Prescott liked the woman. He had a weakness for elderly ladies anyway, possibly because he found their out-dated humor more understandable than the brittle wit of moderns.

“He was your doctor, Mrs. Windowmore?”

“Oh, no!” The lady smiled scornfully. “My doctor is a man named Lownds. He sees me once a day, and that’s plenty. Gruff and gloomy. I can’t stand him. Dr. Sylvester—” She paused. “You knew he was a research doctor, didn’t you? No ordinary psychiatrist?”

“I understood he was studying.”

“That’s why he came to see me—to study me. They say I’m crazy, you know ... Dr. Sylvester was doing experiments, and I was one of his subjects. He’d turn on a light, and I’d press a button. I’m not sure what it proved, but it was good fun. It’s like a personal loss, Captain!” Mrs.

Windowmore turned sharply to Leslie James, her voice unsteady. "Will you get me a glass of water, dear?"

When the girl had gone, Mrs. Windowmore said, "Miss James wouldn't tell me what was wrong. She thinks things upset me. But I knew it was something serious. She was so strange."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, she was terribly affected. Chalk white, and her hands were trembling. I noticed when she gave

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me my medicine—it puts me to sleep, you know. Only sometimes it doesn't work."

Leslie James returned with the water, but there was not the slightest tremor in her long slim fingers now.

Mrs. Windowmore sipped at the drink and said, "What I wanted to tell you happened much earlier this evening, just after I went to bed. I was restless, but I hated to disturb the nurse. She's a nice girl, and seems to like doing things for me, but I hate to be a nuisance. I lay awake quite a while, and then I heard the voices in the corridor ... You can have the glass, dear. I'm through."

"Could you be more definite about the time, Mrs. Windowmore?"

"Well, let me see! One can overestimate so easily in the dark. I went to bed about a quarter of eleven, wasn't it, dear?—and I think I'd been awake about twenty minutes."

"I see. What did you hear?"

"A man and a woman quarreling. The first words I overheard were the woman's. She said, 'You couldn't! You wouldn't dare!' She seemed very angry, but—well—afraid, too. The man said quite calmly, 'It isn't a case of daring. It's necessity. Look, I won't argue with you. There isn't time, and I won't wait. It has to be tonight.' The woman gasped, 'Tonight!' And he answered, 'Tonight!' I can't describe the threat his voice held. And then the woman said, 'I could kill you!' and she sounded as though she meant it. She repeated it, 'I could kill you!' and the man laughed at her. That was all I heard."

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Prescott leaned back in his chair. Mrs. Windowmore met his glance levelly, impressively.

“Did you recognize the voices?”

“I should like to say yes, but it wouldn’t be quite true. At the moment, I recognized neither, though the woman’s seemed familiar. Since you mentioned Dr. Sylvester, I’ve been wondering if he were the man, but, frankly, I couldn’t be sure.”

Leslie James, letting him out of the room, closed the door and said, “I still shouldn’t take her too seriously, Captain Prescott.”

Prescott grinned. “Can’t a mad woman tell the truth sometimes? The story was detailed, you’ve got to admit.... Where can I find Richards?”

She directed him down the hall, and he left her, conscious of her amused glance.

Richards answered his knock and joined him in the hall.

“How’s Miss Lewis?” the Captain asked.

Dr. Richards looked grave. “She’s been hysterical—weeping.”

“Did she actually faint, doctor?”

“Oh, yes. She was quite unconscious—” He stopped, realizing suddenly it was more than a surface question. “Actually? ... You mean was the fainting simulated?” His fingers played nervously in his imperial. “Well, I’m sure I—I never thought of the possibility! ... Remember the stress, Captain, the shock of seeing her fiancé dead! Women have fainted for less.”

“And stood more!”

“But it’s incredible! You’re implying—”

“Nothing! I just wanted to know if she really

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fainted ... Well, let it go. Tell me, what men are likely to be in this wing at night?”

“Doctors. An occasional attendant, I suppose. Why?” “A man was overheard quarreling with a woman here around eleven tonight. I was wondering who it might have been.”

“Who told you this, Louis?”

Prescott repeated what Mrs. Windowmore had said, more than a little annoyed at the expression on the doctor’s face as he progressed. Richards was as amused as Leslie James had been.

He said, “Come with me!” and they returned to the foyer.

The office was crowded with police. The odor of flashlight powder was pungent in the air, and the ceiling was blue with smoke.

“May I touch the files, please?” Prescott nodded, and Richards extracted a folder. “Mrs. Windowmore has been with us many years,” he said, running rapidly through the papers. “As a young married woman she was blackmailed. Some indiscretion—I don’t know what; slight enough, no doubt. But hers was a sensitive nature, and when she was unable to meet the blackmailer’s demands, the strain snapped her mind.

“She is usually almost normal, but occasional violent or suicidal periods require her to be kept here. Also she has hallucinations, quite regularly and always the same. Look: last December 3, the doctor reports almost the exact conversation you heard tonight. Again last November, the same incident, together with the doctor’s opinion that the case should be

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red Diagnosed as paranoia. Here—two years ago—the same thing. Here’s one from 1925—”

Prescott said, “I’ve seen enough ... What the hell am I to believe, anyway? I thought that woman was as sane as I am!”

Richards shrugged. “This is an insane asylum, Louis. Believe no one—unless it’s the doctors. And—” the pause dragged out—“perhaps you’d better talk over what they tell you with me!”

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## CHAPTER VIII

### The Genius

DOC SMITH lumbered to his feet and motioned to one of the policemen to toss the coverall over the body. For a minute after catching Prescott's eye he stood wiping his fingers on a wad of cotton.

"What's this about a maniac's being loose, Louis?"

"Where did you hear that?" Prescott demanded irritably.

"I pick things up."

"Well, what of it?"

Thrusting the cotton into his vest pocket, the old doctor looked around for a place to spit, found none and restrained himself, in no way disconcerted. "Escape from here, did he?"

"What are you getting at? Quit stalling."

"Wasn't stalling." Some instruments lay on the desk, and he began rolling them into a strip of cloth. "Just gettin' my facts." He put the roll into his bag, locked it, and turned around. With a casual gesture at the body, he said, "Your lunatic left some dirty work behind."

Again that persistent suggestion; and again Prescott fought it.

"What makes you think so?"

Doc Smith chewed reflectively. "Take a look," he said. "He's been hacked: stabbed seven times!"

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"Seven times!"

"Twice in the right forearm—one of 'em opened up the whole bone." The doctor illustrated on his own hairy arm. "The others all on the body. One low down on the abdomen; superficial. Another struck a rib and came mighty near cutting his left breast from its moorings. None of these would've done him any permanent harm, but the other three was something else again. One's way over to the left, but I'll bet it's punctured the lung. Another was square in the right nipple and there ain't no doubt where it went. But the last really got home where it was meant to go. You can take my professional opinion: the heart couldn't have been split neater with a pair of dividers."

"I see," said Prescott. "A maniac's work."

Doc Smith nodded. "That is to say," he amended, "there being a maniac in the picture already. Wouldn't go so far as to drag one in, because an excited, angry person might do the same thing."

"An excited, angry person? During a quarrel, perhaps?"

"If you want to imagine one.... Why the hell," Doc added, "don't they provide spittoons around here?"

"But there was no quarrel," said Prescott slowly. Then, more sharply, "And no fight."

"Oh, this kind of room wouldn't show it. No rug. Table's solid. Biggest danger would've been bustin' the glass-work."

Prescott's answer was swift: "With that arm gash, Doc, Sylvester couldn't have moved without splattering his blood all over the place, and you know it."

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Now why wouldn't a man put up a fight when a lunatic was stabbing him to death?"

Doc Smith looked at the corpse a little more soberly. "The first cut might've taken the fight out of him. Maybe he got down on his knees and quit."

"You don't stop and plead with a lunatic, especially one that's cutting you to pieces. You run, or, if you can't run, you yell. Sylvester didn't do either."

"Still ... one of the chest wounds might have stopped him right off the bat. You can't always tell what'll stop a man."

"Maybe ..."

But Prescott was not satisfied. A man fights or runs. He doesn't take seven inadequate, fumbling blows without making a move, particularly from a man he would be on guard against.

"You'd still make an exception for an excited or angry person?" he insisted.

"Oh, sure! Amounts to the same thing—abnormal condition. But when you've a lunatic already— Besides, an excited or angry person still doesn't account for your lack of a struggle."

"I know." But there was a third alternative at the back of Prescott's mind.

"Well," said Doc Smith, "you figure it out. I'm goin' home."

"A couple of questions first. Direction of blows—?"

“Down. Almost 45 degrees ... Referring to the chest wounds, of course. You can’t tell about the others.”

“How about a stab from behind, over the shoulder?”

“No, sir. The killer was in front and close.”

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“And how about the question of sex?”

“Well—” Doc Smith considered the body glassily—“shows more strength than you’d expect of a woman, but under stress of excitement—” He shrugged. “I guess so.”

“And the knife?”

“Sharp knife. Very sharp. That’d have a bearing on the sex business, too—make it easier. Maybe a surgical knife.”

“A scalpel?”

“No. Bigger than that. There are other kinds. Look for one with a blade four to six inches long, narrow, practically no thickness.” Doc waved his big hand. “Well, I’ll leave the body in the morgue till morning. You won’t want a complete autopsy?”

“No need. Clean up the stab wounds.”

“Okay! ’Night!” Doc waddled off across the foyer, and a moment later a stretcher carried away the body.

Prescott looked at his watch and swore. Two-fifteen. He thought of his appointment with the Commissioner, a meeting that would have more meat for discussion than had been anticipated.

A black-haired youth was bending over the desk, blowing fingerprint powder away. Prescott said, “What luck, Willie?”

“It’s lousy with ’em,” said Willie Krutz. “Lots of different ones, and no effort to wipe ’em off.”

“Stick with ’em. Take the elevator, and room 310 on the third floor, too. Then take prints of all the staff. You’ll probably have to come back tomorrow for the day shift. Some prints will be theirs, probably.”

He had a hunch the fingerprinting would be a washout.

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He found Dugan and started him to work on the attendants. “Get the movements of everybody in the building between 10:25 and search. Find out who saw Sylvester.... Also who knew him outside the hospital. I’ll want it tomorrow. And Dugan ... don’t talk to patients.”

Of Richards, watching proceedings disconsolately, he asked, "Where could Parisi get hold of a surgical knife?" and repeated the description.

The question bothered the doctor. He stood uncertainly a moment, then said, "We have such knives, of course. Let's look."

He led the way down the dining-room corridor, past the office, past the basement-way, stopped at the first door on the left, and unlocked it. The room was full of cases of supplies and gleaming instruments, shelves of medical reference books, and models of brain and nerve structures.

Richards said, "We keep a fairly complete stock for emergencies. You can understand the need." An instant later, he added, pausing in front of one of the cases, "A knife is missing, Louis."

The neatness of one shelf was marred by a gap, and the instruments next to it were scattered as though a hasty hand had snatched.

Prescott said grimly, "Who had keys to this door?"

"The doctors; and there was one in the office which nurses could borrow if necessary. We can check on that."

"Unless someone helped himself while Dennis was out!"

When a system depending on one man broke down,

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the Captain thought, it made a swell ruin! Parisi—or anyone—could have got into that surgery.

He took a description of the knife and, asking Richards to wait, got a search started. He hoped for little. The knife was so easy to dispose of merely by walking outside and thrusting it into the ground that it might never be found. He also had Willie Krutz add the surgery to his list.

Returning to Richards, he said, "We've got to talk. I want to know about Sylvester's background."

The doctor motioned him to a chair. "I'm anxious to help," he said, "but I really don't know much. I never saw him until Professor Schlosser brought him to me about four years ago."

"That's Bertram Schlosser at the University? I've met him. Quite a fellow ... Well, tell me: what was Sylvester like?"

"Unprepossessing to look at, but a genius, Louis."

"A genius?" repeated Prescott. "In what way?"

"I'm not talking in a purely complimentary way. I use the term as an accurate, descriptive word. His college record is astounding: Phi Beta

Kappa and Sigma Xi in his junior year, and the highest honors ever awarded at this University on his graduation.”

“You met him before his graduation?”

“Yes. In his final year as an undergraduate.”

“How?”

“In connection with his experiments.”

“What kind? The same he’s been working on since?”

“The root of his present one. They’re technical, Louis; you’d make nothing of them.”

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“I’d like to get some idea what he was doing. You’d better tell me briefly—and simply.”

“Impossible!” said Richards sulkily. “I presume you’ve never even heard of Dr. Gallingstead?”

“I haven’t.”

“Well, he’s a very well-known psychologist on the west coast. Four years ago he was writing a book on Thought, and one of the contributory points that had to be settled was whether there was any correlation between the speed of simple reaction and the speed of association in the individual.”

Prescott said, “I suppose I asked for it!”

“To over-simplify,” said Richards, “there are three kinds of reaction. The kind you get on touching a hot stove—”

“I can understand that one, anyway.”

“—a spinal reflex. You get your finger away before you know you’re burned. The brain isn’t involved until afterwards. The second is the kind you get •when the traffic light goes red.”

“I see,” said Prescott. “From the eye, to the brain, to the leg that puts on the brake.”

“We call it simple reaction. The brain is involved, but not thought or memory or the other so-called higher centers.”

“So I suppose your third type involves those.”

“Exactly. What Sylvester set out to prove was whether an individual who was fast at putting on the brake would also be fast in the process involving thought.”

“How would you measure a thing like that?”

Richards hesitated over his description. “The simple reaction is measured by pressing a key simultaneously

lighting a light and starting a clock. The subject, seeing the light, presses another key which stops the clock. It measures the time elapsed between the light's striking the eye (the speed of the light itself being negligible at the short distance), and the response of the finger. We use a synchronous motor recording a little finer than hundredths of a second. Responses vary from half a second to a second and a half, depending on the individual."

"And the other things—the higher centers—"

"It's the same principle, but we use a test you're probably familiar with, Louis: the association test."

For a moment Prescott was puzzled. Then he said, "Oh, yes. You say, 'table,' and I answer, 'chair.' Needle-pin, grass-green, black-white, and all the rest of them. I know you're supposed to be able to detect criminals with it."

"You can," said Richards.

"We've never tried it in Zenith."

"Well, you can understand that the response of one word to another depends on the memory of those words being heard in conjunction before. It involves the process of thought, memory, imagery."

"I can't see that a comparison of one kind of reaction with another is a very vital point."

This brought a fleeting smile to Richards' lips. "It was a very minor point in Dr. Gallingstead's study, but one he wanted settled. The test runs an hour a subject, to say nothing of the time for constructing the apparatus, so you can see why he delegated it to someone else. Schlosser and he are good friends, and Schlosser passed it on to Sylvester. Sylvester did a thorough, calculating piece of work, proving there

was no correlation. His paper was included without correction in Gallingstead's manuscript, and you can read it, and the doctor's comments, in the book. I'll lend it to you."

"How did the paper interest you in Sylvester?"

"Well ... the general promise. In his conclusions he had made some very provocative suggestions for further study. Schlosser was urging him to take graduate work at the University, following them up. He wanted the co-operation of the hospital, which I was very glad to promise."

“I judge he returned,” said Prescott. “He went on with this reaction business?”

“Yes. He won his Doctor of Science in a single year on the strength of a brilliantly suggestive paper on the speed of reaction in various professional and class groups. Very interesting. He had become quite absorbed in reaction and reaction-types. He published a monograph that same year on age differences in the subject. And then he started on a more difficult and ambitious piece of work.”

“Yes?”

Again Richards hesitated. “I’ll have to sketch more psychological background. Haven’t you had enough?”

“Go on. What’s the subject this time?”

“Diagnosis, Louis. A mental cure depends upon correct diagnosis as completely as does a physical. But one type of insanity so shades into another, and similar and identical symptoms appear in so many different psychoses that it’s extremely difficult.”

“Then anything that helped in diagnosis would be pretty important.”

Though no psychologist, the Captain could see

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what Richards was driving at, but the little doctor insisted on doing it in his own way. “Very important, Louis. It is a field we have barely scratched. Many psychologists have helped by classifying types that develop psychoses. For example, it has been proven that fifty to sixty per cent of people who develop schizophrenia have an identifiable personality before the insanity occurred—a shy, seclusive, introverted type; while, on the other hand, the extrovert, the talker, the man of action, is more likely to develop manic-depressive symptoms if he goes insane. There is also a physical type. It has been found that there are more short, stocky people, thick-necked and squat among the manic-depressive patients, and more long, thin, muscular people among the schizophrenics.”

“You can’t actually judge on that?” protested Prescott.

“Oh, yes! In conjunction with other symptoms and traits.”

“And Sylvester—”

“—thought that there might be a speed-of-reaction type as well as a personality type or a physical type. The stumbling block was that he had to experiment on patients. Patients are difficult—being what they are. The very sight of machinery will send some into spasms of terror. In others it

becomes part of persecution manias. You can hardly appreciate the difficulties Sylvester overcame. He spent hours with them, getting to understand and sympathize. Finally he persuaded thirty of them to help him, and that number has since been increased.”

“And is the experiment turning out as you want it to?”

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Dr. Richards made an impatient movement. “Such a question!” .

“If there is such a type, it would be a pretty big thing, wouldn’t it?”

“A new contributory method of diagnosis would have been a very big thing. It would have carved a niche for him in psychology’s hall of fame. And he was very young!”

“For your hospital, too?”

“If it hadn’t been this, Louis, it would have been something else. The boy was a genius. He’d have produced something of importance inevitably—if he’d lived. That was why I moved heaven and earth to get him here.”

“I suppose you’ve followed the experiments pretty closely?”

“I knew he was working day and night, and that was enough. I didn’t press him to confide in me.”

“He was working alone? You don’t know how close he was to the end?”

“Well, not exactly alone. A young doctor by the name of Winkler has been with him. Winkler’s an older man than Sylvester, but not the same kind—lacking the spark of genius. About six or eight months ago his experiments began to parallel Sylvester’s, and the latter suggested a merger. They’ve been working together ever since.”

“Any trouble?”

“No. The point is, perhaps Winkler can finish the job.”

“Finish the job, and reap the credit.”

Richards frowned. “If there’s a paper, it would be published under their joint names, of course.”

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“But Winkler’d have the chance to follow it up. To win fame in his own right—something he wouldn’t do working in Sylvester’s shadow.”

“Oh, nonsense!” said Richards.

“Maybe.... Anyhow, I’m getting a line on things. I can see now why you hated the idea of Sylvester’s being mixed up in this Parisi business. But he’s dead, and if Parisi killed him—”



“Surely not!”

“What?”

“He couldn’t have,” Richards said flatly. “The insane follow patterns just as the sane do. You tell who committed a crime by the way it was done, and all Parisi’s outbreaks have similar characteristics in just the same way. If he had hit Sylvester with the chair—” shades of Sergeant Dugan! Prescott thought—“or with the telephone or some other handy object, there’d be no question. But a knife!”

This unexpected support of something he had felt all along encouraged Prescott and crystallized in his mind the idea that had been floating there.

“That’s not all that’s wrong with the theory,” he said. “Sylvester would have been careful of Parisi—he knew he was dangerous. But Sylvester was stabbed seven times, and he didn’t make a move to defend himself. It’s cockeyed! I don’t think a madman committed that murder at all. I think it was intended to *look* like a madman’s work.”

Richards’ ejaculation was incoherent.

“Why not?” insisted Prescott eagerly. “Suppose Sylvester was killed with a single swift, accurate blow, taking him unawares—there was one such blow. Then suppose that after Sylvester was on the floor, the murderer

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bent over him and hacked him. To make it look like a lunatic’s crime.... And maybe when it was all over he turned a lunatic loose to give weight to the story.

“What do you think of that theory, Doc?”

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## CHAPTER IX

### Genesis of the Genius

INTERVIEWS with the bereaved were Prescott's *bête noire*, but there was no postponing a talk with Miss Lewis, as he told her.

"I hate to ask a single question," he said, avoiding her eyes, "but you're the only one to turn to for Dr. Sylvester's background, which I have to have."

She said, "I want to help, of course," but the reply was flat and automatic.

Prescott wandered about the consultation room, unable to sit still. Richards was present, and had insisted on a nurse. The Captain had chosen Leslie James, though, remembering Mrs. Windowmore, he could not meet her eyes, either.

Briefly, quietly, Kay Lewis told him that Herbert Sylvester had been born in Minnesota, only son of a rather late marriage. The parents had been unexceptional people, well-intentioned, but lacking in understanding and sympathy. Both were dead, and the girl did not know of any relatives, though her own family had moved next door to his when they were both children.

"I've been told the doctor was a genius," Prescott prompted.

"He was always at the top of his class," she said

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dully. "Even back in the grades. It didn't make him very popular."

"Probably not."

Prescott was surprised when she went on: "We called him teacher's pet, sissy—all those nasty names children know. Bert never got in games or parties. I can remember him standing on the sidelines, looking wistful and contemptuous. Naturally, he grew an armor of pride that took him years to shed."

Her voice had livened with old memories. The Captain, prodding occasionally, let her talk.

"I was as bad as the rest. Sometimes as late as college I was ashamed of him: he wasn't the kind a girl parades before her friends. But I was penitent afterwards. I used to remember that it wasn't his fault; that it was other

people's—my own, partially, for I'd been as disdainful as the rest before I found he could help me."

"How?"

"With my lessons, of course. I liked to hike and swim and play boys' games far more than I liked studying, and I found that Bert would do my homework for me with a little urging. I saw how lonely he was, though I didn't understand, then. I even resented his taciturnity, and tried to pick quarrels with him, which was easy when I learned how."

The words came more easily now. The talking had done her good. Perhaps she was realizing that Bert wasn't gone, that he had left a part of him behind which she could always have.

"Children can't express what they think or feel, but I—I must have meant something to him." The memory seemed to bring her a happiness strange in

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such a moment, but when she went on, it was about something else. "Even when I began growing up—and I did far sooner than he—and realized how socially unsuitable he was, I still used him. I was having the time of my life with parties, dances, dates; and I used to pretend I didn't know Bert during school hours.

"Afterwards, when I was with him, I'd be sorry. I was very sentimental, I expect; I felt motherly and tender. I began to understand how he had been hurt, and I tried to rouse him. I asked him once point-blank to take me to a dance, though I should have been horribly embarrassed if he had. We used to have some weird talks: I thought we were being very frank, very mature."

She stopped. Smiling. Remembering. After a moment, Prescott prodded: "How did he happen to come to Zenith—to the University?"

"Oh—most of our class were going to Minnesota, but one day it occurred to me that if Bert went there, he wouldn't have a chance, while, if he went among men who had no preconceptions about him, he might win a place for himself. I didn't put it as frankly as that, but I got him to go, and we chose this place. It was small, had a good reputation, and—a women's division where I could enroll. I couldn't have let him come alone."

"Did it turn out?" Prescott asked patiently.

"Not at first. Bert was as lost as he had ever been. Everyone was willing to accept him, but he couldn't come halfway. That was only natural after

what he'd been through. But he wanted to, and the disappointment

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was almost too much. He came close to a nervous breakdown.

"It was my fault. I'd met Johnny Dennis and some of his fraternity brothers, and Johnny was giving me quite a rush. I was enjoying it to the exclusion of Bert ... until that night when I found him walking around the campus in the middle of a March thaw without coat or hat, and ... gibbering." Kay Lewis stumbled over the word, but found no substitute. "I was scared. I thought he'd gone crazy. I'll never forget that night—walking him around, talking him back to sense, finally taking him to his dormitory at four in the morning, hoping no one would see me. And the evenings that followed, when I learned all about his fear and his discouragement; they brought us close, closer than I knew, though even then, without putting a name to it, I learned what it would mean if anything happened to Bert. Even now, the thought of his being dead isn't as terrible as the memory of that night."

She went on, after a moment, unprompted: "I had a break later when Bert elected psychology in his second year. Bert liked and admired Professor Schlosser, but, beyond him, he worshiped the subject. He realized he was a psychological case himself, and they say realization is half the cure. At least, his change in the next three years was amazing.

"I'm no psychologist. I've never understood people—not even Bert sometimes; but he used to say that psychology was understanding—understanding tolerance, tolerance love of humanity, and that, in turn, a love of individuals. I can't apply that. I dislike for

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no reason that I can put into words, and there are some things I can't be tolerant about. But Bert could. He could start with psychology and end by making friends with any given individual.

"Please understand—he never acquired a social sense. He went at making a friend as he would at a puzzle or a job. Studiedly."

"Richards has told me of his success with patients," said the Captain. "I can imagine his setting about that cold-bloodedly. But what about more casual friendships? This one with Dennis, say?"

"I've never understood that," said Kay Lewis. "Of course, I've always liked Johnny immensely. He's good fun, decent, very masculine. But, for

the life of me, I can't see why Bert should have been interested in him, or he in Bert. They're such absolutely different kinds."

"How did they meet?"

"During Bert's experiments. All football men were subjects. Johnny told me he got interested in Bert's apparatus, but—" She made a little movement. "That hardly explains anything."

"Sylvester got him his job here after their graduation?"

"Well, Johnny was a garage mechanic first, and a filling station man, a hand at the linen mills, and a general odd-job man. He can't seem to find what he wants."

"And you?"

"When I finished my nursing course, the hospital had just opened this building, and Bert got me a job here, too. I guess the hospital was anxious to do anything

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he wanted. But I shouldn't have stayed if it hadn't been for him. I hate it!"

"How long have you been engaged?"

Kay Lewis hesitated, and her voice went cold. She said briefly, "Nearly two years."

"Really? Financial reasons?"

"No." She hesitated over it. "I don't know—just why we didn't—" Prescott was surprised when she went on suddenly, swiftly: "I know, of course! But it's terrible to say it, when you haven't even let yourself put it into thoughts.... Bert never pushed things.... I was—responsible for our engagement, and ... well, I always wondered if he thought himself trapped. I didn't want him that way."

She pulled herself up, but an instant later was crying. Words came in a rush—bitter, galling words: "It's this ghastly, sickening work of his! Day and night for two years he's lived with these people. He can't stay away from them. He thinks of nothing else; not of me, or of the future, or anything. Days on end, he wouldn't see me, and even with me he kept talking about the terrible things that happen out here, and about the shameless, filthy creatures that he wanted to 'cure'! Sometimes I thought I couldn't stand it any longer. Sometimes I thought—what didn't I think? ... I loved him so. I hated the hospital! It was doing things to him—"

She broke, stopped. Leslie James, on her knees, was holding her tightly. Prescott said abruptly, "I'm sorry. I didn't know.... You go home. If I have

to ask anything more, I'll do it later."

She said, "Oh, please! I so want to be alone!"

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Watching her out the door, Prescott thought, Damn! He hated his business sometimes.

Richards said gravely, "There, Louis, is a sex-starved girl."

"What?" The pseudo-psychological phrase jerked Prescott from his thoughts. "I don't get you. The girl's engaged—"

"Cloistered," Richards broke in. "Cloistered for two years in an engagement with an undemonstrative man."

"You mean—Sylvester wasn't in love with her?"

"Who knows? At least she's missed the attentions, the admiration, the parties, the dances—you notice how she spoke of them? Sylvester hasn't given her much of that."

"Too wrapped up in his work, I suppose."

Richards nodded. "A jealous mistress. 'Day and night,' she said. A woman wants some time for herself."

Prescott, who could never figure out what a woman did or did not want, looked skeptical. "She seemed in love with him."

"Yes. Very much. And that completed the dilemma because she couldn't leave him and seek things she craved elsewhere."

"You see everybody as a mental case," protested Prescott.

"Everybody is, potentially. Can't you see what might have come of her predicament?"

"You're implying she might have—killed—"

Richards looked startled. "I hadn't thought of that," he said. "It's possible. Far more likely, though,

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some man realized she would turn to someone else if Sylvester were out of the way, and—"

"Oh," said Prescott, "I see. A jealous rival. Johnny Dennis?"

"Not Dennis, I think. But—that's what I had in mind."

Crime passionnel, thought the Captain, who occasionally read the Sunday supplements. But why not Dennis? He was the only rival so far in evidence.

The question gained added weight when Prescott, returning to the foyer, learned that the missing knife, against all expectations, had been found. Someone had hidden it in the water tank of the toilet, and Johnny, by his own admission, had been in the lavatory during his sickness.

The knife showed no fingerprints, and no trace of blood. The cover of the tank was also clean, but the wastebasket for soiled towels yielded one that was faintly stained with red, not a direct blood stain, but perhaps a water-diluted one left from drying the knife after washing it. The significance of the towel, of the knife's hiding place, and of its lack of fingerprints as compared with the multitude elsewhere did not occur to Prescott until later.

At the moment, he was bent on a talk with Johnny, whom he found in Mat Loomis' alcove. The Captain got rid of Mat, and stationed Lynch in the corridor as a precaution.

Johnny had recovered much of his color, and his eyes were clear.

He had met Sylvester at the University, he said, four years ago.

"I'll be frank with you," said Prescott. "I find your

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friendship difficult to understand. You couldn't have had much in common."

"Well, no," Johnny said. "He didn't know anything about football, and I don't know a thing about psychology. I had to take a year of it, required, but I thought it was silly."

"How, exactly, did you meet him?"

"At an experiment. All the football men had to take it. We pressed a button when we saw a light, and then we answered to some words he gave us. I got off some pretty good ones, I remember."

"And after that you were friends?"

Johnny flushed slightly. "I got interested in his apparatus," he said. "I like to monkey with machines, and this contraption looked pretty complicated to have been fixed up by a carpetbagger—which is what I'd always considered Bert. We got talking about it, and—well—"

"Yes?"

"I got to liking the guy. I helped him out with some things he was doing, and he kept me from flunking History 161—"

"Oh," said Prescott.

The color deepened in Johnny's face. "Don't get me wrong. I didn't scrape Bert's acquaintance just for that—"

"Then why did you scrape it?" Prescott was sharp.

The boy looked uncomfortable. "I suppose I wanted to know what he was like. I'd heard a lot about him—"

"From Miss Lewis?"

"Oh ... so you know?"

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"In part. But Miss Lewis never figured you out very well."

"She never tried," Johnny grinned. "She was a pretty smooth number, and I gave her a lot of time my freshman year. I thought I was doing all right, when she quit me cold. I thought I'd insulted her, but later, she went out with me again, and I could see she was full of this Bert Sylvester. After a while, I decided to find out what he had that I hadn't."

"And did you?"

"Yes. But I can't tell you what it was. Brains, maybe, only I'd never been much impressed with brains before. "When you like a person, you don't stop to ask yourself why, and if you do, all you can think of is a bunch of noble attributes that sound silly when you say 'em.

"No—wait," Johnny contradicted himself. "Maybe I do know why I liked him. He seemed to understand what I wanted better than I understood myself. Take studies. Never once did he make me feel dumb. I could even argue with him and feel I had common intelligence. The trouble with me is, I'm lazy. If I have dreams, and I guess I have, I'll probably just go on dreaming until I'm too old to do anything about it. Bert seemed to know that, but not to think less of me for sitting around on my tail doing nothing, though he was just the opposite himself.... This is a hell of a thing to make an athlete explain! Bert would have put it into a short sentence, but—"

Prescott grinned. "Tell me, did Miss Lewis' being in love with Sylvester strike you as strange?"

"Well," said the boy judiciously, "not strange exactly. Women do some God-awful things, and there

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was a time when I certainly thought she was throwing herself away, but I guess she knew."

"Are you in love with her?"



“Oh—you know how it is. You give a girl time, and if she likes you and shows it, why first thing you know, you’re batting ’em out together. But if she stays cold, you go around looking for someone else. Kay’s never given me a break since the first couple of months.”

“Was Sylvester in love with her?”

Dennis looked blank. “They were engaged, and I know damn well Kay was in love with him. Sure, he must have been.”

“Did it ever occur to you, Dennis, that you might have a chance with Miss Lewis if Bert Sylvester wasn’t around?”

“I wasn’t the kind to think that far ahead,” said the boy with a grin. And then the grin faded. “Hey, wait a minute! What are you trying to do—accuse me of putting Bert out of the way so—” He stopped, the grin returning. “Hell! That’s foolish!”

“Maybe,” admitted Prescott, and then added slowly, “We found the knife with which he was killed.”

“Yes?” Watchfully. Prescott told him where. Dennis went tense, but his voice remained matter-of-fact. “That puts me on a spot, doesn’t it? But look! I was out of the building—”

“Yes, but we’ve only your word for when you got back. Those cramps you claim to have had gave you five or ten minutes’ leeway, which is plenty of time for a lot of things.”

Down the hall, a telephone rang, and Prescott

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reached for the receiver on the desk. “Prescott speaking!”

“Oh!” said Mrs. Vreeland. “It’s for you, Captain. A man named Reilly —”

“Yeah,” said Louis Prescott. “Put him on!” O’Reilly! he thought. What now?

And then, with a certainty there was no explaining, he was aware of trouble coming. O’Reilly might have a hundred reasons for getting hold of him: it might be good news; Parisi might have been found. But Prescott knew he hadn’t; that it was trouble.

“Officer Harding just called in,” came O’Reilly’s voice.

“Harding? He’s on First Street?”

“Yes, sir. He called from First and Quarry.”

“That’s in the Italian section, O’Reilly. You’ve picked up Parisi’s trail?”

“Yes, sir,” said O’Reilly. “We’ve got his trail, I guess. Harding says there are a dozen witnesses.”

“Witnesses? What do you mean? Have they got Parisi?”

“No, sir. He got away clean. And, of course, there wasn’t anybody who could swear it was Kim. But it stands to reason. The guy must have been crazy, sir—slugging him right out in the middle of the street that way.”

“Slugged? Who? Where?”

“Right at the entrance of an alley between First and Second Streets on Quarry,” said O’Reilly, answering the last question first. “They don’t know yet who he is. You see, Parisi smashed his face in with a stone, and left him lying in the street. It’s a mad-man’s crime if I ever heard of one.”

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“Sounds like it,” said Prescott wearily. “Get hold of Doc Smith again. The rest of the boys are still here.”

Richards, it seemed, hadn’t exaggerated about Joseph Parisi, after all!

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## CHAPTER X

### More Trouble

THE little Italy of the city of Zenith was an elongated section of six or eight city blocks lying between and on both sides of First and Second Streets, a pair of long arteries reaching from the suburbs to the city's center. At three in the morning it was deserted, dark, occasionally dangerous. The widely spaced street lamps made little impression against the dingy black walls and the streets glistening from their flushing down. Quarry Street was near the northern boundary of the section, and crossed both First and Second.

The police cars came down First, swung left into Quarry, and stopped short of a knot of people that had gathered near the center of the block. Windows were alight in nearby buildings. Men and women in all sorts of costumes stood on the pavement, a noisy, excited crowd that parted before Prescott, making an aisle straight to the entrance of an alley.

There was a street light on the right, casting a very black, distinct shadow close to the building on that side of the alleyway, and from this shadow protruded a pair of feet in flashy sport shoes. Three policemen made a little semi-circle holding the crowd back. One of the officers made way for Prescott.

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"Harding, sir," he identified himself. "I was here first."

Prescott said, "What happened?"

"I was over on First when I heard a woman yelling. I came on the run, and when I got into this street, she was standing up in that window across there, and a crowd was gathering, and I came along in and found him just as he is now. I blew my whistle, and then made sure he was dead. When Currie and O'Malley got here, I went for the box. That's all I can swear to, sir, but there's plenty here say they saw it happen."

"Has the man been identified?"

"No, sir. You'll see why if you turn the light on him."

Dugan turned the beam on the figure. Prescott said, "Yeah." He went on, "What about the murderer?"

“He must have gone the other way—towards Second. At least, he didn’t come to First. Nobody did. I’ll swear to that.”

“I came from Third,” Currie put in. “I saw nobody running away, though plenty was running in this direction.”

“And I was away down Second,” O’Malley contributed. “There was a couple of guys walking towards me, but they weren’t hurrying, and of course I didn’t know what had happened.”

Prescott knelt beside the body. The dead man was a squat, hairy individual in shirt sleeves. His clothes were cheap and sporty. He was sprawled loosely in the angle of the wall, one hand outflung and clenched. There was something in the fist, a button,

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sewed to a tiny piece of torn cloth. Blue serge. What had Dr. Richards said? “Parisi would be wearing a dark blue suit with a coat but no vest. That may help. There won’t be many dark suits these hot days. It’s serge—”

Prescott handed the button to Dugan. “Evidence!” he said.

He took the light from the Sergeant, and passed it searchingly over the ground near the body, but the pavement, washed clean, showed no traces of interest.

“Now,” he said to Harding, “these eye witnesses.”

A youngster of fourteen, tremulous with excitement, pushed forward. “I saw it, sir,” he said swiftly. “I saw him come down the street and he met this other man at the alley, and he yelled an’ hit, an’ they fought, an’—”

“Wait a minute!” exclaimed Prescott.

The boy had seen a man come up Quarry from First, meet another at the alley entrance, and the two had had an “awful fight” during which one had been killed, and the other had “got up and run off.” But he could identify or describe neither, and was not sure which was survivor and which victim.

This was nothing to what was to come.

Harding thrust forward a Mr. and Mrs. Donelli who lived on the top floor across the street, and had, they insisted, seen everything.

“We were at the window, my wife and I,” the man explained. “It was so hot! We could not sleep. From Second Street a man comes, and passed in front of us. Who he was, I do not know.”

“How was he dressed?”

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The Italian shrugged broadly. "Who should say? So hot a night—"

His wife said with flat finality, "He wore a coat. A long one."

"Sapristi! An overcoat on so hot a night? It would be mad—" He forsook English for an explosive tirade in his native tongue. Prescott called him to order, and Donelli returned reluctantly to English and his story: "He reached the alleyway and stepped from the curb, and just then, someone came running out and bumped into him."

"Not running," interrupted Maria. "He stepped from the shadows just as the man in the overcoat reached there."

"There was no overcoat, and the man was running! Did I not see? Women! She could not have been looking. She was thinking of me!"

"Pah! Were you wearing an overcoat? Were you running?"

"When the two men met," Prescott interrupted, "what happened?"

"The man from the alley hit the man who had been walking."

"He had something black in his fist," supplemented Maria. "I saw it in the light. He struck the man once."

"Once!" protested Prescott, glancing toward the body. "Oh, come! That boy we had here said there was an awful fight—"

"That is not so!" exploded Donelli, his voice breaking. "I saw with my own eyes. Once, the man was hit, once, Captain! Is it not?"

"Perrone is right," the woman nodded vigorously.

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"Once it was, and no more. The man cried out, and fell, and the other man took to his heels and ran off."

"Which way?"

For an instant there was silence. Then the woman said, "Toward First it was, for he did not pass our window."

"Síl Maria is right. The other way, he must have gone."

"Did you notice how he was dressed?"

"That maybe was the man with the overcoat," said Donelli.

"So!" snapped Maria. "You think I cannot see! You think—"

"Never mind what he was wearing!" said Prescott. "Now this boy said a minute ago that a man came from First. Did you see him?"

"The boy was excited. You cannot trust one of his age to remember what he sees when a man is killed in front of his eyes. Two men there were, and none coming from First."

The crowd had made disapproving murmurs at various points in both the boy's story and the Donellis', but now one voice became distinct: " 'Scuse me, suh! Ah seed a man comin' from First."

Prescott glanced up to see a negro face gleaming in the light of the lamp. It -was a thin, hollow-chested young black who proved to be a janitor for the corner store, who had taken the liberty of spending his nights there when he had nowhere else to go.

"Yassuh!" he said. "Man come round de corner, walkin' soft. Went right by me, 'bout ten feet away."

"Any chance of your remembering what he had

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on?" Prescott was getting tired of this question, but someone ought to have noticed that blue serge suit.

"Yassuh! He us wearin' a swell shirt, suh. Ah seed it under de lamp. Yassuh! Look like silk. Blue wi' nice yalla stripes. Sho was some shirt!"

"Was he wearing a coat with it?" asked Prescott, frowning.

"No, suh! He wa'n't hidin' it none a-tall!"

"Well—what happened?"

"Man walks down de street slow. 'Nother man a-standin' right in de mouf of de alley. Man with de nice shirt walks up and slugs him. Hit him right in de face, he did. Then he runs down de alley."

"Down the alley!" shouted Prescott. "My God!"

Dugan said, "The alley's blind, and every door on it locked tight."

Prescott said, "Listen, boy. Before the man you were watching hit the other, did he stop to talk?"

"No, suh! Jest walk up and slugged him!"

"Did the man in the alley have a gun? Did it look like a hold-up? I'm trying to find out if there was any reason for this man's taking a poke at the other fellow."

"No, suh! Sho was a crazy thing to do, wa'n't it, mister?"

Crazy! thought Prescott. Of course it was crazy!

There was a movement in the crowd, and a tall man in a white uniform pushed his way through. "Say, Captain," he began, "I've stood here listening to these phony stories long enough. I'm Jake Tenders, a driver for the Zenith Dairy, and I saw most of it. None of these people have got it straight."

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Prescott said with a sigh, "Thank God there's someone who can talk English and see straight. What happened, Mr. Tenders?"

The man grinned. "My truck's around the corner on Second where I always park it. I've got only two customers down Quarry, and I serve them in my carrier. I noticed a fellow walking ahead of me in the same direction, and about forty or fifty feet away. You've been asking how he was dressed, and I happen to remember he had on a white shirt with sleeves rolled to the elbows."

Prescott was conscious of a flood of relief. The murdered man, walking from Second! This fitted!

"I meet this same bird quite often. We both get to this place about the same time. I don't know his name, but we've said hello."

"I see. Habit of his to come down here every night, eh?"

"I guess so. Well, he reached the street lamp, when all of a sudden another fellow came across the street towards him. I didn't see where he started from—whether he's this guy coming from First—but he came on the run. My man—the one in the shirt sleeves—stopped under the light, and the other fellow came up to him, and they stood talking for maybe fifteen seconds. Then the man in shirt sleeves started to run away, but the other man struck him with something in his hand."

"How many times?"

"Well, more than once. He knocked the man against the wall and held him there, striking, before he let him fall."

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"And how did the killer get away?"

"Well, sir, he turned in my direction, saw me, and then ran off at top speed toward First."

"First!" Harding had stated flatly that no one had emerged into First!

But then, there was no reason to believe Tenders more than the rest. The sequence of events had been too rapid to be followed, and people had seen different things. What he had heard was a strange mixture of fact, impression, and imagination, and each story would have to be taken down and analyzed in the light of probability until some reasonable composite resulted. It was a job for Dugan. He told the Sergeant as much, and was wearily amused at the distaste that welcomed the instructions.

Doc Smith arrived at this moment, and elbowed his way through the crowd. "What is this?" he grunted. "The massacre of St. Bartholomew?"

He looked at the dead man's face in the light of the flash. "Another lunatic job, hey? Only the fellow's lost his knife."

"We've got the knife," said Prescott. "What did this?"

"A club or a stone. Even a blackjack if it were swung to mutilate. I can clean this up if you want to see what he looked like."

"All right."

The doctor dragged his black bag closer and pried into it for a swab. Presently he reported, "The skull is fractured in two places from blows on top of the head. This business on his face wouldn't have hurt anything but his looks, and there's some bruises on

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his arms and shoulders that wouldn't have damaged him much, either."

"Two or three effective blows and a lot of ineffective ones," Prescott mused. "Remarkably like the Sylvester business.... Anyway, we've got a fight this time."

"Your madman's a great one for good measure," Doc said. "How's that look? It's putting Humpty-Dumpty together again, but maybe you can get an identification out of it."

Prescott beckoned Dugan. "Suppose you have some of these people take a look at him, Sergeant."

"Yes, sir," said Dugan, and then, his eyes following the beam, "Wait a minute! I know that guy!" He groped an instant. "Toscarello—that's the name. Luigi Toscarello."

"Has a record?"

"Yeah, sure! He's got a beer parlor and gambling joint up on—Kirsted Street, I think. He's handled drugs, and was in the booze racket when that was good. We've had him in on vice charges, too."

Prescott said, "A bad man."

He stood a moment, wondering why it struck him wrong. Joseph Parisi had escaped three hours before, had happened on this man in a side street, and Toscarello had died, an innocent victim of that chance encounter.

An accident.

But how rarely it is that a bad man dies by accident.

How much more natural if Toscarello had met an enemy here with an account to settle, and had paid his debt!

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That was the kind of thing a policeman would have expected.

But the thought was foolish. There was a maniac loose; the maniac's coat button was in his victim's hand. Why go out of the way to find another explanation?

## CHAPTER XI

### The Parisi Family

OFFICER O'MALLEY also knew Toscarello, and had even exchanged greetings with him as he had left his restaurant about 2:15, not fifteen minutes before he was killed. Toscarello, said O'Malley, put himself out to be friendly with the cop on the beat.

It was his habit, O'Malley added, to walk home every night by the same route: up Second to Quarry where he crossed to First, and then up First one block to an apartment on Washington. Suggestive, Prescott thought.

So, too, was the officer's informal estimate of the restaurateur: short on brains and long on meanness. O'Malley had seen him twist a waitress's arm once; and his restaurant-bar sheltered a gambling house and bordello, if the vice boys were right.

The Fates had indeed been ironic, if such a man had died by accident!

Prescott decided to go home. It was well after three, and there was the meeting with the Commissioner in the morning. Leaving final instructions with Dugan, he pushed his way through the thinning crowd, and was on the point of stepping into a police car when a taxi squealed to a stop beside it, and Jerry Keenan, the reporter, leapt out and buttonholed him.

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"Wait a minute!" he begged. "What's the excitement?"

Prescott sighed. "If you must know, Jerry—we've another murder."

Keenan whistled. "One on either side of the railroad tracks, eh? Who's the victim?" Prescott told him. Keenan stared up at the low-hanging July stars. "Something about—dope, wasn't it?—and booze, and vice. We've got it in the morgue. Kind of a bad egg?"

"I guess so."

"Who killed him?"

Prescott shrugged. He sketched what had happened, neglecting to mention the button. The nature of the wounds caught the interest of the reporter.

"Like the business at the hospital," he said. "No connection, I suppose?" He paused, while a sly smile grew on his face. "Both men weren't killed by the same person? By—Joseph Parisi, perhaps?"

So the secret was out!

“Where did you hear that name, Jerry?”

“Fellow named Loomis mentioned it. I think you tried to do me out of a piece of news, chief.”

Prescott said earnestly, “Perhaps Joseph Parisi didn’t kill either of these men!”

“No? They both look like a madman’s crimes.”

“Maybe they were supposed to. Maybe Parisi is being framed.”

Keenan laughed. “I know what’s bothering you, chief! Two murders in print while Parisi’s still at large means trouble, but—”

“Whatever my reasons,” said Prescott with sudden frankness, “how about giving me a break. I won’t forget you or the paper—if you do.”

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Keenan saw the implied threat and said seriously, “I’d like to, but it’s a big story. I’ll keep it quiet until my paper goes to press, to preserve my exclusive. After that, it’s up to my editor. Talk to him. ’Night!”

He went off toward the alley. Prescott, looking after him, felt hollow. Trouble. An escaped lunatic had been routine three hours ago; an escaped lunatic with two dead men behind him was something else again. It was no good trying to stop the story at the newspaper office—it could be done sometimes by bringing pressure to bear on the police reporter himself, but this was too big. The only thing to do was find Parisi. If he had him when the news broke, he’d be all right.

To go home and to bed was impossible now. The police machine would grind relentlessly without him, but he felt he had to help. He called O’Reilly, but there was no news. Hanging up, he stood uncertainly while the urge for action—any action—built up inside him. Parisi would probably show up at his home eventually; it was the most likely place, and it wasn’t far.

Impulsively, he gave his driver the address, and a few minutes later they drew up before the building, to be approached and recognized by Hallahan, the officer in charge of the search, who reported they had been watching front and back since shortly before one.

“There was no one home when the boys got here,” said Hallahan. “The family marched in like a parade at a quarter of two, they tell me, and with the exception of one son, Stephani, who came along at three, no one has been in or out since.”

Prescott said, "There's a light upstairs. Are they still up?"

"They were when I told 'em about the escape half an hour ago. Not being home when the boys were posted, they didn't learn of it until I got here. The youngsters were abed, but Big Tony and his wife and two of the older kids were sitting around drinking wine. They offered me some, sir, but I refused," said Hallahan virtuously.

"I guess I'll go in and see 'em," said Prescott.

His knock was answered by a thin, delicate youth who took him upstairs to a warmly lighted, old-world sitting room.

Big Tony Parisi was typically florid in his greeting. He was a grinning, barrel-like man, a huge mass of flesh degenerated to fat, remarkable principally for his perfect, gleaming teeth, and for the peculiar trapezoidal shape of his head. His cranium was very small, his jaw very long, with the result that his face slanted forward in an unforgettable fashion.

There were four others present: Angela, the wife, a woman as big as her husband; Isabella, a girl of seventeen or eighteen, a young beauty with lustrous skin and glowing eyes; Antonio, the frail boy who had admitted him; and Stephani.

Prescott looked with more than usual interest at Stephani. He was perhaps twenty-seven, and as beautiful as his sister, with curly black hair, clear, transparent skin of deep olive, and a slim, supple build. His clothes were elegant, and, in spite of the heat, as fresh and crisp as though newly donned. It was a beauty and perfection distasteful in a man, and it

was accompanied by an effeminacy of movement that made the Captain crawl.

Prescott, who, truth to tell, had made this call out of little more than curiosity, mentioned Joseph, and expressed the hope that the family would help in locating him. He was not surprised to find Big Tony uninterested: it was the hospital's worry. Big Tony shrugged it off with the suggestion that it was not very serious.

"Maybe more serious than you think," Prescott told him. "Your son has left two dead men behind him already."

If he had tossed a bomb into the man's lap, he could hardly have produced a more startling effect. The big jaw sagged, the little pig eyes

sprang wide. “Two!” he exclaimed, and then quickly, “Two dead men he has left behind him? I do not understand, Capitan. What you say once more?”

There had been a movement somewhere in the room, but Prescott had failed to place it. Looking from face to face, he saw that Stephani was, of them all, most shocked. These people, he told himself, had been acting, pretending indifference, and they had been about to pretend surprise. Only their surprise had turned out to be real.

What had they expected?

“In escaping from the hospital, he killed a Dr. Sylvester.”

Stephani started to say something, but smothered the words. Big Tony said nervously, “Sylvester? The name is strange.”

“A research doctor who had been working with Joseph.”

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“That is too bad!” But Big Tony sounded as though he were thinking of something else. “And the second?”

“A man by the name of Toscarello—”

“Not—not Luigi!” stammered Tony. “Not the man who has a restaurant close to mine?”

And then Big Tony and his family went into their act. Prescott knew it was an act as though he had seen it rehearsed. They pitied poor Toscarello, they called down maledictions upon their son who had done such a thing. They said how horrible it was, and how the hospital should be more careful. They were eloquent.

Prescott’s mind raced while they talked. The Parisi had been primed for Toscarello’s death, but Sylvester’s had been the surprise. That argued they had expected Toscarello to be killed.

And Toscarello had died by accident; by a chance encounter with an escaped madman.

What was it Dugan had said about Big Tony? “Slippery as what you’re trying to remember. Any time anything important happens, he’s got an alibi. It happens so often the boys gave him that for a nickname.”

Suggestive—in view of the iron-clad alibi they had for Toscarello’s death. And iron-clad was the word. When you have detectives watching a place, and they swear a family went in at a certain time and didn’t come out again, you couldn’t pin much on them. There was Stephani, of course. He could stand some checking.

But if Toscarello had died by accident— If!  
When Tony came to a stop, Prescott said, “You

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seem to have known this Toscarello pretty well. Tell me about him.”

“That is not so!” protested Tony. “I scarcely knew him. We would say hello and speak of how poor is business, but beyond that—... Still, it is terrible to have an acquaintance of long standing killed by my son. I am sorry!”

“Did you like the fellow?”

Big Tony shrugged broadly, and with apparent frankness confessed, “What can one do? One cannot like everybody, and when a man plays you dirty tricks—”

The frankness, Prescott thought, had its purpose: to anticipate inquiry. Suspicion became flourishing.

“Tony,” he said, “where did you spend the evening?”

The big man hoisted himself upright, and protested. He said it was outrageous, intimated that his integrity was being questioned, wanted to know why the police wasted public time on innocent men. Prescott let him wear himself out; then repeated the question. Big Tony, having registered his protest, pulled the rest of his alibi out of the bag. He and his family had called on Judge Esti at nine o’clock and had remained until 1:30, after which they had walked home, arriving at a quarter of two as, no doubt, the police themselves could testify. Then Big Tony sat back and grinned.

The phrase “iron-clad” recurred to Prescott. Judge Esti was a highly respected old jurist whose word would be accepted without question.

The Parisis could have had no more perfect alibi if they had intended it—as, perhaps, they had.

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There remained Stephani. He asked, “Did you all come home?”

Big Tony smiled. “Oh, yes—your police! They would have told you that Stephani came in later. He stopped to play pool at Spinucci’s.”

Prescott’s heart sank again. Spinucci was also reliable. He turned to Stephani. “Stay there all the while, did you?”

“Yes, sir.” He spoke a clear, concise English, in marked contrast to his father’s accent. “We played for about an hour, or an hour and a half. I won.” He jingled some change in his pocket.

“Can you prove you were there?”

“I should think so. I was playing with a couple of fellows I know pretty well: Danny Spiello and Al Luciano. And then Spinucci himself must have known I was there. Check up with them.”

Virtually, the Parisi had been covered from nine to the present, and though it would all be carefully checked, of course, the Captain had a curious feeling that he was up against a perfect alibi.

And a perfect alibi from a man who had earned the nickname of “Alibi” was a most suspicious circumstance.

The Parisi must have known what was to happen that night, and had taken their precautions.

## CHAPTER XII

### Possibilities

LOUIS PRESCOTT succeeded in getting to bed about four. He was tired, and bothered by the knowledge that he was in for the day of depression and indigestion that followed any stinting of his sleep.

Deliberately, he set about banishing thought. He had never been one to hash over cases after the lights were out, but the escape and the double murders were too recent to be dismissed. Thoughts seemed to multiply at the very effort of getting rid of them.

After five minutes of it, he found himself wide awake. His mind was racing, though his body wanted to rest.

Well, he thought, so be it. Take it deliberately: it would have to be done in the morning anyway.

What, exactly, could have happened at Hughes Hall?

Facts: At 11:15 Sylvester and Parisi had been in 310. At 11:35 the former was dead, the latter out of the building.

The sequence of events? Prescott was a believer in reducing things to their simplest. It was surprising how far reconstruction could be carried by that means.

There were, fundamentally, only two possibilities:

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Sylvester had either (a) left 310 with Parisi, or (b) he had not.

(a). If he had left 310 with Parisi, two more generalizations were possible: he had done so either (1) voluntarily, or (2) involuntarily.

(1). Voluntarily meant that Sylvester had deliberately taken Parisi out of the building, a theory supported by his sending Dennis away and drugging him (?) to delay his return.

There was no guessing at motive.

Was it conceivable that Sylvester, knowing how dangerous a man he was handling, aware of the criminal nature of his actions, and pressed for time, had permitted Parisi to get into a locked surgery, then allowed himself to be cornered in the office, and there submitted to being cut to pieces without a struggle? The Captain didn't think so.



More likely, a third party had seen Sylvester setting Parisi free and had seized the opportunity to kill him.

(2). It was equally possible that Sylvester had taken Parisi from 310 involuntarily. This presupposed a show of force: the possession by the madman of a weapon of some sort. The knife was obvious—though not how or when he could have got it. Richards had scorned the idea of knives in connection with Parisi, but who could be sure? Assuming for the moment that he had one, and had used it to force an escape, he might well have murdered Sylvester to prevent immediate pursuit.

This did not account for the lack of a struggle or for Johnny Dennis' errand, nor was it fundamentally sound to believe that Parisi would have forced someone

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to accompany him downstairs instead of creeping off alone. But the man was insane; there didn't have to be a reason.

(b). Returning to the second of his original alternatives—that Parisi had not left 310 with the doctor—Prescott perceived that there were two further possibilities: that, following the doctor's departure, he had (3) wandered out by himself, or (4) some unidentified person had come for him later on.

(3). By a singular coincidence, Parisi might have walked out of the hospital during that twenty minutes, without a soul seeing him. The third floor was empty, Dennis was gone, and Sylvester, supposedly taking his place, was dead. Coincidence.

If this had happened, the escape and the murder were separate, save that the murderer might have seen Parisi wandering out and had acted accordingly.

(4). The last possibility was the one Prescott had voiced to Richards: that some unknown had killed Sylvester and then set Parisi free to lend color to the theory that a madman was the murderer. It depended upon the same set of coincidental circumstances—the vacancy of the third floor corridor and the absence of Dennis—that made it possible for Parisi to have walked out unseen.

For this theory you had to grant the unknown nerve and luck.

Parisi could only have escaped in one of these four ways, and only one of them—No. 2—left him the murderer. No. 2 was the weakest of the four.

It was odds-on, then, that a third party was the killer.

Because of lack of struggle, it -was also odds-on that

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Parisi had deliberately been framed, though there were two minor chances that would account for the nature of the wounds at least: the excited, angry person whom Doc Smith had agreed to, or a madman other than Parisi. Neither accounted for the lack of struggle, nor was there evidence so far that another madman had been loose or that a quarrel bitter enough to arouse anger, excitement and murder had taken place.

Odds-on that Parisi had been framed.

Granting that, there were two possibilities: (1) that someone had seen Sylvester freeing Parisi, or had seen Parisi escaping by himself, and had seized that opportunity to settle a grudge, in which case the murder was unpremeditated, or (2) someone had killed the doctor and turned Parisi loose afterwards which might point to either premeditation or opportunism.

There were some generalities bearing on the question of premeditation. The public nature of the place militated against it. A person, to plan such a crime, would have had to know Sylvester would be at Hughes at that hour, that Johnny Dennis would not be there (unless, of course, Johnny were the murderer), but, granting even these possibilities, how could he have counted on the movements of the eight to sixteen attendants on the first and third floors, or have figured against some outsider walking in at a critical moment?

It would take a man of nerve, with faith in his luck, to plan against those odds.

It would have been simpler for the murderer to have secured the knife ahead of time than to have

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gained access to that locked surgery on the spur of the moment; but the apparent haste with which it had been snatched from its case suggested unpremeditation here, too.

A clinching argument occurred to Prescott, but he went back over it carefully, for it was tricky:

Why hadn't the knife been left beside the body?

Coming from the surgery, it pointed to no one. Why had the murderer wasted precious time in -washing, wiping, and hiding it?

Had he intended to return it to the surgery, and been interrupted? This, Prescott realized, was the flaw.

Far more reasonably, the knife had been washed because the murderer had to wash it. To remove fingerprints. And if there were fingerprints, it meant the murderer had worn no gloves, and no gloves meant no premeditation.

The argument was weighted with probability.

It could be carried farther: if there had been fingerprints on the knife, and if, as Willie Krutz had said, no attempt had been made to efface prints in the office, one of two things followed: the murderer was sure he had left no prints anywhere but on the weapon, or he knew that his prints could be explained legitimately if found in the office. Those of doctors, or attendants—or of Johnny Dennis—would naturally be there in the course of their work.

That argument was faulty, too, but, such as it was, suggested that someone on the staff—particularly on the Hughes Hall staff—was guilty. This was borne out by the hiding of the knife in the lavatory when an outsider could have disposed of it so much more

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successfully outside the building, and not strain his chances by lingering either.

From all this, Prescott was inclined to draw some tentative conclusions: that the murder was unpremeditated, the direct result of Parisi's release or escape, and most certainly he had been framed for it; that the murderer was one of the staff, a person with a grudge, an opportunist, nervy, intelligent enough to consider and figure on the question of fingerprints, ruthless enough to lay the blame on a lunatic, heartless enough to hack a dead body.

Who fitted this description?

From the standpoint of motive, there were few suspects. The strongest was Dr. Winkler's. He might have much to gain.

The straws of evidence pointed to Johnny Dennis, but Johnny's motive was more subtle than Prescott gave him credit for being.

Vague, too, was Kay Lewis' possible motive, though her love, he supposed, might have turned to hate.

Slim pickings. Sylvester had not been one to provide motives.

And that, Prescott thought, was the big difference between the night's murders. Sylvester had few enemies; Toscarello must have bred them.

Other than that, the crimes were similar: the public place, the wounds, the suggestion that Joseph was the killer.

Joseph, apparently, had killed the Italian, but the Captain knew that if he had not already known of the escape, he would have suspected premeditated murder at once. The fact that the killer had brought his weapon with him and taken it away again, that it had been Toscarello's habit to walk home every

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night by the same route, that the particular spot chosen had been distant from the nearest policeman by several blocks—all that looked like premeditation.

But it was too much to suppose that Joseph Parisi had been framed for two separate murders in one night.

Separate? Or were they?

And what about this perfect alibi of the Parisis? To the policeman in Prescott, it smelled. Why should an innocent man have such a perfect set-up for the one night in a year when a double murder was committed?

And how could anyone have a premeditated alibi for an unpremeditated crime—if his conclusions about Sylvester's murder were sound?

Prescott thought: if Toscarello's murder were planned, the Parisis' alibi was premeditated for an unpremeditated crime—at the Estis'—and accidental for a premeditated one—when the police showed up at their house looking for Joseph!

The Parisis, he supposed, might have known Joseph was to escape and be framed for the Toscarello murder. They might have figured that the police would arrive at their home in time to cover them for the murder if they provided for themselves during the time of the escape. That would have been clever and not too hard to figure.

But Sylvester's murder had been a surprise to them.

Nor could they, always excepting Stephani, have had anything to do with either crime, actively speaking. Their alibi was good.

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That meant there was someone in the background, a shadowy figure about whom and whose plans the Parisis knew. There was no guessing who he might be, or what his motives were, but it was clear the Parisis would not be safe as long as they had his secret.

Prescott got up and drew himself a glass of water. Gray dawn lay in the east, dimming the stars, picking out the shapes of houses, trees, shrubs. The air was fresher.

Climbing back into his mangled bed he thought of the Commissioner, and of Jerry Keenan and the evening papers, and of Headquarters for the next few days if Parisi wasn't located. He thought of reaction time and red lights and Sylvester standing in the office and letting somebody hack at him, and of somebody in an overcoat bending over him and calling him a genius, and the person in the overcoat turned out to be Stephani, saying that he had been at Judge Esti's all the time. Prescott could feel someone creeping up on him with a knife, and was so paralyzed with fear that he couldn't move to defend himself, though he tried to scream. Everyone thought it was only a lunatic suffering again, and nobody came but Parisi who stood watching while Dennis murdered him.

Prescott woke to find it broad daylight, with the clock on the bureau saying eight, which was going to make him late for his conference with the Commissioner.

He felt lousy.

## CHAPTER XIII

### The Morning After

THE morning began with a dispiriting breakfast at a drugstore, for the family was away vacationing, and that was followed by the conference with the Commissioner. The subject was the carnival grounds. The Commissioner mentioned the murders only briefly, and Prescott, who knew he should refer to Parisi, got cold feet and said nothing. He left with the firm, depressing conviction that he was in for the bawling out of his life when the old man found out.

At the office, which he reached at ten, there was no news.

Dugan, as bleary-eyed and grouchy as his chief, produced the first encouraging thought of the day. He had come to the conclusion, he said, that there was something phony about both murders. Dugan always warmed Prescott, for he had a knack of putting into words what the Captain was feeling. His reasons were usually excuses, but his instinct was good. Parisi was guilty of neither murder, he said.

“Then do you think the same person killed both men, Dugan?”

“No, sir.”

“Why not? If Joseph was scapegoat for both crimes why not a single murderer?”

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The Sergeant rasped a hand over his face. “I took it for granted it couldn’t be. When Sylvester was killed, I figured someone in the building did it. If so, the whole bunch were still at the hospital when Toscarello was killed on the other side of town.”

That spoiled the Captain’s brightening mood. It had been bad enough when O’Reilly and Dugan had pointed things out to him the night before. The realization that they were still at it was souring.

He switched abruptly to details.

The stories of the Toscarello witnesses had been typed up, but a glance showed they were as bad as could be expected. Doc Smith’s autopsy report on Sylvester was ready, but its only new information was that the knife which had been found “or one just like it” could have made the wounds. Dugan said that a detective had been sent to the druggist of Johnny Dennis’ story, and

that the undertaker wanted to know where Sylvester's body was to be shipped and who was going to pay the funeral expenses.

"About those interviews with the Hughes Hall staff, Dugan—"

"The boys finished up after I left," said the Sergeant. "I'll see if they're typed."

The report turned out to be long, involved, and probably inaccurate. The exact times of a series of actions are almost impossible to get under the best circumstances, and a building full of busy nurses was far from that. If anyone had wanted to cover the five or ten minutes necessary for the murder, it could have been done.

Before he tackled it, he started Dugan off on the trail of the Parisi family, describing their perfect

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alibi. "I'll see Judge Esti myself," he said. "You make sure there are no ways out of the Parisi home that our men weren't covering. Check on Stephani with Spinucci and the others and follow up any leads. And I want a dossier on the Parisis—a connection between them and Toscarello, if possible. That means a dossier on Toscarello, too."

Routine detail. The Captain felt he was making no progress at all. It was like sitting on a gunpowder keg, watching the fuse burn down, and making no effort to put it out. Damn routine! It got results, but it failed to satisfy the need for action.

When Dugan had gone, he got to work.

It turned out that the third floor women's wing had provided an alibi for itself, and that the first floor men's wing—with the exception of Mat Loomis—seemed to be eliminated. "Loomis claims," read the examiner's comment, "that his patients both had quiet nights. He spent the whole hour before the search in the corridor reading, and no one passed him going in either direction during that time." This afforded the others in that wing a clean bill of health, but it proved nothing about Loomis himself, for the report added with heavy police humor: "The other nurses don't like him; they think he dodges work. So they didn't strain their memories trying to make an alibi for him. Several saw him in the alcove, and no one saw him out of it, but none of them will swear he was there all the time."

As for the rest, it was a mess.

Prescott was most interested in the first floor women's wing where Kay Lewis had worked, and here, luckily, movements had been fairly simple. Miss

Lewis herself had not been questioned, since she had gone home as soon as her interview with the Captain was over; but her movements had been reconstructed from the testimony of the rest. The Captain, glancing at the clock, decided enviously that she would probably be still asleep, and made a note to call her later to check the story.

This was the reconstruction, and Prescott read it with interest:

10:25—Mrs. Kelly, corridor; Miss Lewis, 102 with Dr. Lownds; Miss James, 104; Miss Stilles, 106.

10:30—Lewis and Dr. Lownds to 104.

10:35—Lewis, Dr. Lownds, and James to corridor. Lewis and the doctor walked toward the foyer.

10:40—Lewis returned alone.

This, Prescott realized, agreed with the record of Dr. Lownd's departure from the building as noted by Johnny Dennis. A telephone call reached the doctor, who confirmed his visit to Hughes and to 102 and 104 specifically. He had been in a hurry, he said, having an after-the-theater appointment with his wife at eleven, and he had taken Miss Lewis with him as far as the foyer while giving her instructions about her patients. Then he had left the building, returned to his office, and finally left the hospital for the night. By 11:15 he was downtown. He was sure of that because his wife had mentioned it several times.

10:50—Kelly to 103 in response to a cry. Patient had fallen and cut herself. Called Lewis and James to help her. Lewis went to surgery

for bandages, returning in a minute or two. All three remained with 103 until she was quieted.

The Captain added a couple of underscored words beneath his note to call Kay Lewis. If she had visited the surgery a half hour before the murder, she must have gone to the office for the key and so known that Johnny Dennis wasn't on the job.



More important than that, had she relocked—or even closed—the surgery door behind her?

Here was a vital question, for if the surgery door had been standing open, it simplified the murder a good deal, eliminating the necessity of going to the office for the key, or even of knowing where the key was kept.

11:05—Lewis left 103.

11:08—James left 103. Found Lewis talking with Dr. Thomas outside the door of 102.

11:15—James observed Lewis enter 102. Dr. Thomas went down the corridor toward the foyer.

Thomas ...

For an instant Prescott failed to place the name, and then he remembered the notes on the office spindle.

Thomas! A new figure, precipitated suddenly onto the very scene of the crime just a few minutes before the murder!

Excitement beating in his veins, Prescott reached for the phone.

The doctor, of course, was not in. He would be

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back later, in the afternoon or evening. Could he call? Prescott said he could.

11:17—James to 105.

11:20—Stilles, in 106 since 10:25, returned to corridor.

11:25—Kelly, in 103 since 10:50, returned to corridor.

11:27—James says she went from 105 to 107. The others did not notice her.

11:28—Stilles returned to 106.

11:30—Kelly returned to 103.

11:35—Stilles returned to corridor.

11:40—Wiese came with news of the escape. Lewis came out of 102 in time to meet him.

James was found in 107, Kelly in 103.

No alibi there for anyone, the Captain thought.

He pushed the sheaf of reports aside and went to look for Willie Krutz, impatient to know if the fingerprinting had turned up a lead.

Willie was busy and very tired. “Gawd!” he said, catching sight of the Captain. “What a job this has been!”

“How’s it coming?”

“Just polishing off,” the little man told him. “Sent a man to the hospital for the day staff before breakfast, but we got ’em all now. Every print identified!”

There had been, he explained, forty-three different prints after eliminating duplicates and those too blurred or incomplete for use. These had boiled down to sixteen people, all of the Hughes staff.

“There turned out to be one place in the office that was wiped,” Willie interpolated here. “The inner

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handle of the door. Not the outer—that showed your prints, Dennis’, Sylvester’s, and Loomis’.

“Loom— Oh, yes!” the Captain corrected himself. “I remember he tried the door ... But Sylvester’s? That looks like he’d let himself into the office.”

“And the murderer let himself out,” added Willie. “And he had no gloves. That’s important.”

“I’d figured it out,” said Prescott, feeling superior. “It means an unpremeditated murder by someone in the hospital.”

“In the hospital? Why?” Prescott explained his reasoning, but the little man objected. “Maybe he was sure he’d left no other prints?”

“Could he be sure? With his life hanging on the point, wouldn’t he wipe nearby surfaces, just in case? Unless it made no difference?”

Willie conceded it was a point. He added that Parisi’s prints were not in the office. “I’m assuming those splattered all over 310 are his,” he explained. “There are none of them in the office, lavatory, or surgery, but a hand print’s in the elevator.”

“That’s negative proof. What else?”

“Well, Sylvester’s are in 310, the elevator and the office. Nowhere else.... And Richards’. His are all over everything. Both doorknobs of 310, same of the surgery, and the only distinguishable prints on the elevator controls are his. He’s in the office, too.”

“That would be right,” admitted Prescott. “He must have handled all those places last. Smeared up the trail, I guess.”

Willie had typed out a list which he now handed the Captain. “There’s the works,” he said, “in a general way. I just started on another, listing the exact

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places all the prints were found. Maybe you can make something of it. I can’t.”

Prescott got the second list eventually, but it told him nothing that the first missed. This, excluding the three men Willie had discussed, read:

Dennis—elevator, surgery, office, and lavatory;  
Loomis—surgery, and office door;  
Wiese—310 and office;  
Lewis—surgery, office, and lavatory;  
James—lavatory, and office;  
Stilles—lavatory;  
Billings—surgery, and office;  
Levy—office, and lavatory.

The last three were first floor attendants. There were also five unfamiliar names marked “Day-Staff.” The list suggested little enough, but there were a few points: when had Wiese been in the office? Or Loomis and Billings in the surgery? Or Dennis in either surgery or elevator?

It also, as he had anticipated, tended to limit the field of suspects to Hughes. Aside from Richards’, there were no outsiders’ prints, and no unidentified ones. There was only the doubtful alternative that the murderer had been positive he had left no prints save on the two surfaces he had wiped.

By the same token, the theory of unpremeditation was strengthened.

There were so many things to do that morning that Prescott, leaving Willie, found himself standing on the sidewalk in front of Headquarters uncertain which to tackle first.

Judge Esti was closest.

He found the judge in his chambers, a gray-haired

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but youthful old man with smiling eyes, and a kindly, lined face.

“What is it, Louis?” he asked. “I’ve a jury coming in, but I’ll let them wait if it’s important.”

“I won’t take long.” Prescott accepted a chair. “We had a couple of murders last night, and I’m doing some checking Up.”

“That will be Parisi,” said Judge Esti with a ghost of a smile. “Big Tony, slippery customer that he is, must have been making an alibi for himself at my expense. Is that it?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“I hate to think Big Tony’s mixed up in murder.”

“I’d bet he knows something about it.”

The judge leaned back, the quirk of humor still on his lips. “I have to laugh at Tony’s machinations, Louis—there’s no other word for them. He plans tortuously, and yet rather childishly at bottom—as all tortuous plans are.”

“He claims that he and his family were with you last evening.”

“They were. The whole ghastly family! It was late for a call, I thought: a few minutes after nine.”

“And they stayed how long?”

“Unconscionably late. My habit is early to bed, but they seemed not to know it. Possibly that’s why I thought of the alibi possibilities of their call as soon as you appeared, Louis.”

“Can you give me exact times?”

“Oh, yes. They impressed that on me. At 1:25 Big Tony looked at his watch, exclaimed how late it was, apologized profusely for staying so long, and made haste to leave.”

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“Did you corroborate the time in any way?”

“By my own watch. And the clock in our bedroom showed a quarter of two when we went up shortly afterwards. My wife was caustic about it. There was no tampering, Louis.”

“Were any of them out of your sight during the evening? Surely—”

“Ah, but they weren’t. It was a little pointed. They wouldn’t even let me leave when I wanted to get some cigarettes at the store. It was deliberate, Louis: none of us left the room. My wife and I can swear it. It’s perfect.”

“From nine to one-thirty, eh?”

The judge nodded.

“How well do you know the Parisis, Judge?” Prescott asked. “I’m surprised at their calling on you.”

“They presumed on a casual acquaintance,” Judge Esti smiled. “I’ve eaten at his restaurant—he’s a good cook, if you like the food of our nationality. The call was quite unanticipated.”

“What do you think of him?”

“He amuses me, but I suspect the whole family is not quite normal,” said the judge gravely. “They have a case of insanity, haven’t they? There are other things. Angela complains of sickness, though she’s healthy as a horse. Stephani has some unpleasant traits—personal habits. I understand the two oldest girls are hellions, and the younger—little Isabella, the beauty of the family—was very ill this spring with something rather different, I suspect,

from the double pneumonia it was called. They're mentally unhealthy, the whole lot."

He smiled, adding, "But then, the whole of our

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race is temperamental. Fierce, unstable emotionally. Don't forget, Louis, that vendetta, violence, passion are in our blood."

Well, Prescott thought leaving the chambers, that was that! A perfect alibi for everything that had happened at the hospital. A premeditated alibi for an unpremeditated murder.

There was the matter of Sylvester's relatives to be settled for the undertaker. It could probably be done by going over Sylvester's things which was necessary sooner or later anyway.

Prescott thumbed his notebook for the address, took a street car, and ten minutes later was admitted to a small rooming house by a gray-haired, dour woman, who regarded him with suspicious eyes and directed him to the second floor. She remained in the hall while he mounted the stairs and rapped.

A second rap brought a creaking of bed springs, and a sleepy voice said, "Beat it!"

Prescott identified himself, and the response was, "Oh!"

A moment later Johnny Dennis opened the door.

"I have to look over Sylvester's things," Prescott explained.

Johnny said, "Oh!" again and sat down on the edge of the bed to watch with drowsy sullenness. "Go right ahead."

The room contained two beds, a dresser, a desk with a portable typewriter on it, and two straight chairs. The curtains were dirty gray, the rugs colorless and worn, but the walls had been decorated with pictures from art magazines, a purloined sign or two,

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and a vivid designless tapestry. On the dresser stood a framed picture of Miss Lewis.

The place impressed the Captain with the absurdity of putting Johnny Dennis in the role of a murderer. It was his room, not Sylvester's, and it was the room of a college boy, not yet quite grown up, still getting a whale of a kick out of feminine nudity, still stealing signs. It was absurd!

Prescott started on the dresser. The top right-hand drawer—Sylvester's—revealed a miscellany of toilet articles, medicine, and dress jewelry. At the

back was a sheaf of papers bound with a rubber band, which Prescott seized upon.

There was a savings account book with a balance of \$833.56. The deposits were irregular and small.

“Sylvester have a checking account?” Prescott asked. “I see no withdrawals here.”

“Paid in cash,” Johnny said. “He was tight with money. Never had much, I guess.”

Besides the bankbook there was an insurance policy for a thousand dollars made out originally with beneficiary Mrs. A. Wentworth Sylvester, but with the name of Katherine Lewis written on the form at the back.

There were some circulars advertising scientific books, a catalog of psychological works, and four pamphlets dealing with related subjects. There were no bills, no personal letters. It was clear the doctor had been no correspondent. Well, thought Prescott, one more little problem! The man must have relatives somewhere.

Replacing the drawer, he explored the typewriting desk. There was yellow paper, a dozen sheets covered

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with typing, headed, “The Possibility of Contributory Reaction-Time Diagnosis.” Prescott glanced through it to make sure it was all the same thing.

Returning to the dresser, he went through two drawers without finding more than Sylvester’s conservative collection of linen.

Moving to the third, he realized that he had passed to Johnny’s possessions. It and the one below it were jammed to the top with a motley collection, of which clothing was only a part. There were more signs, and—as Johnny looked askance at the Captain—a policeman’s hat. There were numerous letters in feminine hands, a scattered pad of tablet sheets covered with diagrammed football plays, and the remains of Johnny’s student days: a pile of notebooks, featuring more drawings than notes, and books, some of them so new it was hard to believe they had been used.

The remaining drawer, the top left, was full of dirty clothes and toilet articles.

“Well,” Prescott said, after examining the clothes closet, “there’s little enough here.... What can you tell me about Sylvester’s movements yesterday?”

“Not much: I didn’t even see him till 4:30.”

“Well—from 4:30 on, then.”

“Nothing much happened. He sat around while I dressed—I sleep most of the day, you know—and then we went to supper—my breakfast—a little after five. We got back here about 5:30. I stayed long enough to put on a tie, and then caught the street car to the hospital that goes by at 5:40.”

“And the doctor?”

“Bert was here when I left. I didn’t see him again till 10:30.”

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“At dinner—or recently—has he showed strain or worry—”

“Well, yes. He’s been sort of queer recently. Working too hard, I guess. He’d laugh sometimes when nobody’d pulled a joke, or he’d go gloomy for a while, and he sometimes imagined things. But the last few days he’s been pretty cheerful. Nothing like he was a week ago.”

Prescott, frowning, repeated, “A week ago?”

“He was ’way down. Talking wild, worried. I expect it was the experiments. He gets that way over them.”

Prescott probed a little but got nothing more. Going downstairs, he found the dour woman waiting for him suspiciously. Prescott identified himself, mentioned Sylvester, and the woman—a Mrs. Cleeby—immediately softened and became sentimental.

“Wasn’t it horrible,” she said. “It was all in the papers, but I couldn’t hardly believe it. I felt real sorry. He was the one boy in this house that treated me as though I were anybody. These college scamps don’t care about anybody’s property or patience.”

“We’re checking up,” said Prescott. “Mr. Dennis tells me Sylvester was here at 5:40. I’m wondering if you know when he went out?”

“Yes! I do! I met him in the lower hall, the poor boy! Just about a quarter past six.”

“Do you know where he was going, Mrs. Cleeby?”

“It was a sort of accident, but I do. He was going off without his coat or hat. Of course it was a hot night, but those are just the kind a body catches cold on, as I told him. He thanked me, and that’s more than anyone else in this house would have done, but

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he said he was just running over to the library for a couple of hours, and guessed he wouldn’t need them.”

“The University library? Do you know when he returned?”

“Well, yes! Just after nine. I had a telephone message for him.”

“Telephone message? From whom?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure. The person asked for Dr. Sylvester, and when I said he wasn’t here, could I have him call, this man said no, would I give him an important message, and I said of course! Then he says just tell this Sylvester two words, will you? Just say that a party called and said, ‘Near eleven!’ ”

“How did Dr. Sylvester take it, Mrs. Cleeby?”

“He said, ‘Thank you very much,’ as though he knew what it was all about. You don’t suppose—? Goodness! The murderer—!” For a moment the elderly lady was quite breathless.

“Oh, I doubt it,” said Prescott. “This sounds like something the doctor was expecting.”

“Oh, yes, sir. He wasn’t at all surprised. He just stood there nodding his head—you know how a body does. Then he says thank you very much like I told you, and went upstairs. Maybe, though, it did worry him a mite,” said Mrs. Cleeby reflectively. “I passed his door a little later, and heard him pacing around like a person does when he’s nervous ... Goodness! You don’t think he knew he was going to be murdered?”

Prescott doubted it, but the telephone message was important.

“Near eleven!”

Something had happened very near eleven!



## CHAPTER XIV

### The Missing Notebook

PRESCOTT had seen the movie version of research laboratories, featuring steaming retorts, simmering fluids and liquid mysteriously pulsating in veins of glass. This ill-prepared him for his visit to the one at the hospital, in the basement of the Administration Building.

It was an over-crowded cubbyhole, more like the shop of a carpenter or electrician than a scientific lab. There was a heavy work-bench against the wall with a cupboard of tools above it, and a pile of material on the braces underneath, ranging from bakelite slabs to lumber and strips of metal. Two storage batteries were charging on a stand; three others were attached to equipment, and a round dozen dry-cells were lined up on a table.

Dr. Winkler, a plump, freckled young man in his early thirties with scant, sandy hair and eyes that were queer behind thick glasses, said with a tentative smile, "We do a little plumbing on the side."

Richards, who had brought Prescott down, retorted testily, "We do our best. We've no provision for laboratory fittings."

Indeed, the three major pieces of equipment were obviously hand-made. Prescott knew he was looking at the things Richards had told him about the night

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before, and he began to appreciate Johnny Dennis' interest in them. They looked pretty complicated.

With youthful curiosity Prescott crossed to the equipment and monkeyed. He located a synchronous motor, a bakelite double-contact key, a light in a pierced box, and a telegraph key for the subject's response, but a typewriter roller on which traveled a pen controlled by a magnet and an endless chain was puzzling. It must be the method of measuring the association test.

Winkler, responding to Richards, was saying, "Bert and I wouldn't know what to do in a high-toned place." He flushed, catching himself. "I keep thinking of Bert as alive. I've been watching the clock all morning, expecting him, and then remembering that he's—not coming."

He stopped, but his visitors found nothing to contribute. "It wouldn't be so queer," he said, "if I'd seen him—dead. But I didn't know till this morning. It all seems like a practical joke."

Prescott said, "I hope you won't mind talking about him. You must have known him as well as anyone—"

Winkler shook his head. "I didn't know him outside the lab. He was one of those queer ducks a person can't figure out."

"Queer?" It was the second time the word had been used to describe Sylvester.

"He was a genius," said Winkler.

"That's no explanation!" Richards said sharply.

"Maybe it was the way the patients liked him. The boys used to say it was because he was as crazy as they—joking, of course."

"Dr. Richards told me about his success with patients,"

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said the Captain, "but I shouldn't call that queer, exactly."

"There were other things. He'd get moody, irritable, ugly sometimes, and recently he's got to worrying about someone stealing his work before he could get it published—quite irrational considering the nature of the thing. But it was almost a persecution mania."

"Dennis said he'd been badly depressed, too."

"That's right," said Winkler, his eyes pale behind his spectacles. "It started about two weeks ago—maybe less. He suddenly started to sit around with his head in his hands, doing nothing, and you had to shout to arouse him. It was more than being moody. He seemed almost afraid. Don't ask me of what."

Prescott was thoughtful. "But this depression ended several days ago according to Dennis."

"Three or four. He came into the office one morning in high elation, hummed, worked like a demon, but when he came back from lunch, he was right back where he'd been, as depressed as some of our patients."

The final phrase caught Prescott's ear. He remembered Richards' saying, "All the insane aren't in hospitals." And he had been looking for an explanation of the freeing of Parisi.

Winkler was explaining to Richards: "He was high one minute, low the next: a clearly marked cycle of mania and depression."

"Sylvester wasn't insane, was he?" Prescott voiced his thought.

Winkler wrinkled his nose. "I shouldn't have said so."

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Richards added, "I'm sure he wasn't. I talked with him daily, and he was quite rational. Edgy, perhaps."

"Still," said the Captain, "during the past two weeks, to use your own words, he's been through a persecution mania, a period of deep depression, and finally cycles of mania and depression. If he wasn't insane, he was at least in some kind of emotional state."

"Overwork, the pressure of hope, the strain, might have developed a nervous state easily mistaken for an emotional one," said Richards, and Prescott realized he had stumbled on a technical phrase.

"It was emotional," said Winkler, taking up the cudgels where Prescott had dropped them like hot pokers. "There was an affect of fear in the depressed moods, and of joy or relief in the elated. Definitely emotional."

"Perhaps!" Richards snapped ungraciously.

"You'll pardon a formality, Dr. Winkler," Prescott said hastily. "Naturally the police must check on everybody, and—"

"Quite all right," said Winkler with a smile.

"I presume you can account for yourself? You were home?"

"Well, no. As a matter of fact, I must have been here in the lab at the time Sylvester was killed."

"So?" Prescott felt a faint tingling. "Let's have it from the beginning. You spent yesterday here?"

"Yes. Till after five. I had a problem I was stuck on."

"Was Sylvester here?"

"Until two-thirty or three. He was gloomy."

"All right. Now, when you went home—?"

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"My wife and I had supper shortly after six—as soon as I got home—and after we had put our little girl to bed, we dropped in on some neighbors for bridge. That was about seven-thirty. We stayed till ten."

"Ten? The game broke up rather early, didn't it?"

"We're no night hawks. Besides—my wife has another baby on the way, and we try to get in early."

"I see. Home at ten," said Prescott. "And then?"

“My wife went upstairs while I went to the corner drugstore for cigarettes.”

“How did you happen to come out here?”

Winkler looked uncertain. “Well,” he said, “you know how it is. You work and work on something, and get nowhere, and then you take a rest, and first thing you know, bing! you’ve got the answer.”

“That problem you’d been stuck on?”

“Yes. I got a little excited about it—you know how it is. You want to start working. So I telephoned from the drugstore and told my wife I was coming here.”

“And what time did you get here?”

“Mrs. Vreeland would have it recorded. It was around eleven. I walked out—about two miles—it takes about half an hour.”

“You reached the lab by eleven?” Prescott repeated.

It took a moment to collect his thoughts. It seemed questionable that Winkler would walk so far on a hot night and excited as he claimed to be, but if he had reached the building by eleven, the point was unimportant. At eleven Sylvester and Parisi were in 310.

“Did you leave the laboratory after that, doctor?” he asked.

“Not until 12:25—12:30—something like that.”

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“I’m going to ask a very frank question. Is it possible to leave this basement without returning to the upper floors—where Mrs. Vreeland would see you?”

Winkler said promptly, “Oh, yes. The janitor’s entry is always unlocked, and there are windows. But I didn’t leave the basement.”

“Thanks.” Prescott wondered why he always suspected ulterior motives in other people’s frankness. “Before I finish, I want to know a little about this experiment. I judge you’re the only one who knows much about it. It was pretty important, I hear?”

Dr. Winkler stuck out his pudgy lower lip, and let it curl reflectively. “Well,” he said, “Dr. Richards seemed enthusiastic, and of course Bert was. Maybe it’s wish-fulfilling optimism.”

“You’re not optimistic?”

“Not as much,” said Winkler. “Bert had hold of something, but his handling of patients had a lot to do with his proving it; and how the tests

will work when applied by lesser men, I don't know. My guess is, they'll be discredited for practical use.

"The idea is pretty revolutionary," he went on, overriding Richards' attempted protest. "People are going to say first that it's poppycock, second that it isn't practical, and third that the results were faked because no one could get the co-operation of patients to the extent that Bert did."

"Nonsense!" said Richards.

"Sylvester was too young to anticipate the opposition his idea will arouse. Older scientists won't believe a youngster just out of college capable of sound experimentation in such a novel problem. It steals

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their thunder. They'll do their damndest to disprove it."

"Nonsense!" Richards repeated.

"The theory has been proved?" Prescott asked.

"To Bert's satisfaction, and to mine," said Winkler. "A reaction test will contribute to the diagnosis of doubtful cases—if you can get your patient to take the test."

"The experiments were complete?"

"Practically."

Prescott said casually, "You intend to complete the job?"

"I'm the only one who can," said the young man, smiling.

"Whatever way the paper is received," said Prescott, "it will make a name for you, won't it? Too bad Dr. Sylvester won't be here to share the rewards."

"And the headaches," said Winkler, easily. "He could have answered questions far more lucidly than I, and I'm going to be sorry he's not here before the psychologists are done with me."

Prescott got to his feet. "Okay," he said. "Thanks a lot."

Winkler intimated that it had been a pleasure. Then he said, "Dr. Richards!" The wizened superintendent paused, but Winkler hesitated before saying, "Did Bert give you his notebook with the paranoiac data?"

Prescott, on the threshold, watched Richards finger his imperial, frowning. "He's shown me nothing in a month or more, and never one on paranoia. Why?"

"I can't locate it, offhand," Winkler said. "I went through some of Bert's material this morning, realizing

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I'd have to finish it up. Everything's here but that, and it's the one he's been working on recently. I gave Dennis a ring, but he says Bert had no notebooks at home."

"It'll turn up."

"It means a lot of work to be done over if it doesn't."

"Your desks are quite a mess, if you don't mind my saying so. You'll find it under or back of something."

In the hall, the little doctor shook his head. "That's a very cold-blooded man, Louis. He's exaggerating, of course. There will be opposition, but—"

Prescott knew that Winkler might have deliberately run down the importance of the paper to weaken motive, but it was possible, too, that his judgment was the coolest of the three.

Thinking it over, Prescott decided there was a case against Winkler: his motive was more clear-cut than before, he had no alibi, he had been admittedly two minutes' walk from Hughes, and he was a cold-blooded, calculating man.

But there was a doubt, too: he was possibly too calculating to commit an unpremeditated murder.

## CHAPTER XV

### Genius is Akin to Madness

ON his way back to the office, Prescott saw the afternoon papers. Jerry Keenan had bannered his news:

#### MANIAC KILLER AT LARGE IN CITY

JOSEPH PARISI, EXETER PATIENT, SLAYS DOCTOR AND  
FLEES

Kills Second Time—Italian Restaurateur Victim of  
Berserk Murderer

At Headquarters the effect was already being felt. There were an increasing number of anxious, hysterical calls, largely from women, a few irate and abusive ones from men, and the usual flood of I've-just-seen-him! messages which had to be followed up. But there was no actual news of Parisi. It looked like a bad afternoon.

The Commissioner had called twice, and was on the phone again before the Captain had a chance to sit down. He was caustic.

Prescott listened in stony-faced silence, but when he hung up he was boiling. It was many a year since he had taken a reprimand like that, and the knowledge that he could have forestalled it by mentioning Parisi that morning helped not at all.

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He summoned Dugan and Hallahan, and laid them out in choice and unconsidered language, and it was a good deal of satisfaction, though quite unjustified. There was nothing any of them could do or could have done. And so, when he felt relieved, he said, "Pull up some chairs. Let's go into this!"

The discussion lasted two hours, and out of it came several suggestions that were left to Hallahan to work out.

Dugan managed to end it on a dismaying note:

“We can’t fail to pick Parisi up if he shows his face,” he said. “But what if he doesn’t?”

“You mean he’s hiding? He’d have to come out for food—”

“I mean he’s being hidden,” said Dugan.

“By God!” Prescott’s fist struck the desk. Of course! If Parisi was being framed, it was only a step to guess that he was a prisoner, too, and if so, no amount of routine work was going to find him.

There was a corollary to this proposition that offered a gruesome ray of hope. Prescott voiced it: “Parisi may have learned too much about our murderer—what do you think, Dugan? He may turn up dead. It would be a break for us.”

“I’ll widen the search,” said Hallahan. “It’s a good chance.”

But when Hallahan had gone, Dugan said heavily, “That’s no good. We gotta find the murderer before we get Parisi.”

Prescott nodded. “What about Stephani’s alibi?”

“Very neat,” said Dugan. “I wrote up some statements for Spiello and his pal to sign. They’re there on the desk.”

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The Captain glanced at the paper headed, “Toscarello Case: Voluntary Statement of Daniel Spiello, of—3rd Ave.” In the Sergeant’s best statement style it read: “On Tuesday, July 18, Albert Luciano and I, Daniel Spiello, were at a movie all evening. After the last show we went to the Club Romano. We got there a little before twelve. Chico Romano, the proprietor, spoke to us several times. A little before one, we started to walk home, but decided to stop at Spinucci’s pool hall. Stephani Parisi came there, too, at 1:40. He said something about how late it was, which is why I know the time. The three of us played till ten of three, till Stephani said, ‘Look at the time. We better quit.’ And we did. Between 1:40 and 2:50 none of us were out of the room.”

“Luciano,” said Dugan, “says the same thing almost word for word. They were taken separate, of course.”

“Just who are these two, Sergeant?”

“Weak sisters,” said the Sergeant. “We’ve nothing against either. Spiello’s orphaned, a local boy, clerks in Banion’s department store. Luciano’s from out of town—been here about a year. Got a half interest in a paper stand.”

“How does it strike you, Dugan?”



“Well,” said the Sergeant, “Stephani was fixing himself an alibi. You can tell from the pat stories, and his calling attention to the time. So he must have known what was to happen, though it doesn’t look like he could have had anything to do with it.”

“Maybe not,” said Prescott, “but I don’t like to have alibis thrown at me. What’s Spinucci’s lay-out?”

“Two rooms on the second floor. A little bar in the

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first and a pool room in back, with a half-door between them.”

“How about clocks?”

“Also two, a wall clock in the pool room and an alarm clock on the back bar out of reach of everyone but Spinucci.”

“Could the wall clock have been tampered with?”

“By climbing on the table. All three in the pool room would know about it.”

“And Spinucci would have known about the alarm clock, eh?”

“The devil of it is,” Dugan expanded, “that Parisi commented on the clocks in both rooms the minute he came in. ‘Damn! Is it that late?’ he says, and Spinucci looks around and sees it’s twenty of two. Stephani bought a drink and carried it into the back room. Spinucci heard him say, ‘I’m late. Is there time for a game or two?’ And one of the others says, ‘Sure! It isn’t a quarter of two yet,’ as though he’d looked at the clock.”

“Did Spinucci stay behind the bar?”

“The whole time. And he heard them playing inside. When they came out, Stephani said, jokingly, ‘We’ve kept you up pretty late, Spinucci. Here—it’s part of my winnings,’ and he tosses a dollar on the bar. Spinucci looked at the clock, saw it was ten minutes of three, and said he was always glad to oblige the young men.”

“Whew!” said Prescott with a feeling of discouragement. “How about other exits from the back room?”

“No doors,” answered Dugan heavily, “two windows, second story, giving right onto Second Avenue—and both nailed down.”

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“Sure of that?”

“Yes, sir. I couldn’t budge them, and the carpenter I had take the nails out said the nailing wasn’t recent.”

Prescott said wearily, "Well, what about Spinucci? Could he and the two boys be in with Stephani?"

"I don't know Spiello and Luciano from a hole in the ground," Dugan said, shaking his head, "but I do know Spinucci. I think he's one damn fine Italian."

"That was my own opinion," said Prescott.

"He's a little greaseball, of course," said Dugan, "dark, fat, grinning, but sentimental and funny, with a raft of kids—did you ever hear him tell about them? He gets an awful kick out of what they do. I've seen him cry over a neighbor's getting hurt, and joke over his own bad luck. He's not the kind to be mixed in a murder."

"If Stephani really wanted an alibi," said Prescott, "why didn't he go home with the rest of his family? We provided an air-tight one for them."

"I see what you mean," said Dugan. "A little fishy."

"Look! Let's forget Spinucci's all right. Let's go after him as though he wasn't. Perhaps Stephani has a hold over him. Perhaps he has bad eyesight. That alibi's got to be cracked! And it's your job, Dugan!"

His face heavy, Dugan left the room, and his place was immediately taken by a harried-looking desk Sergeant. "The mayor wants you to call, sir. And Dr. Walford, and Mr. Hilton— Aw, I've got a whole list of 'em. It's been hell on the telephone. Like going through the third degree. I'm bushed!"

"Bushed!" said Prescott. "Well—by God!"

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The desk Sergeant left the office beet-red.

From the mayor Prescott listened to lengthy political platitudes on the sanctity of the home and the protecting arm of the law, and said, "Nuts!"—after carefully hanging up. The rest of the list went into the wastebasket.

There was a pile of reports on his desk:

The statements of Spiello, Luciano, and Spinucci from which he extracted nothing to add to Dugan's summary;

Doc Smith's report on Toscarello: nothing new;

The transcripts of the Toscarello witnesses, five minutes of which discouraged him;

The statement of Minwell Kull, druggist at the corner of Amster Avenue and the Boulevard, who had identified a photograph of Johnny Dennis as the young man who had come to his store at about eleven p.m. of the

preceding night with two of Dr. Sylvester's prescriptions. The first was a strong sedative frequently used at the hospital, the second an emetic kept on hand there for emergencies.

There had been nothing unusual about either prescription, and he had mixed them without question, a process requiring ten or fifteen minutes. Dennis had not left the drugstore before eleven-fifteen. Kull had not seen him take the emetic, but, if he had, it would have taken effect in a very short time.

The two prescriptions, on Sylvester's paper, and in similar, precise handwriting, were attached.

This started a disturbing train of thought: what if Johnny hadn't taken that drug until much later? What if, instead of walking back to the hospital, as

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he claimed, he had had a car, or a taxi, or even a bicycle? Suppose he had traced or forged that prescription? There were, Prescott remembered, other straws of evidence. If he had reached the grounds at 11:20 instead of 11:30

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Then he shook his head. It was too tortuous, too calculated, for a Johnny Dennis, for a college boy. His weariness was running away with him!

His watch told him it was 5:30. There was supper to get before returning to the hospital. For a minute he felt like an old man. A long evening to go; so much to do! It was wiser to go home and get some sleep.

He was trying to argue himself out of an unpleasant job, but it couldn't be done. Too much trouble was ahead.

He got his supper, and reached Exeter by seven-fifteen.

Mrs. Vreeland, in her office at the Administration Building, made no objection to showing him the register of arrivals and departures for the preceding night, and Prescott was staggered by the appalling number of entries, most of the names unfamiliar. What if they all had to be checked!

The first familiar name in the entry was: "9:21— Dr. Richards."

He asked casually, "Does Richards come in often at night?"

"Oh, that man!" exclaimed Mrs. Vreeland. "He's in and out at all hours. They say he only sleeps five hours a night, and I can well believe it, for he comes in at the queerest times. His wife got a divorce, you know. My husband says—"

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The Captain, used to this sort of thing, forgot to listen as he read on down the list. At 10:05 was the entry: "Dr. Sylvester."

"Did Sylvester always get here as late as this?"

Mrs. Vreeland looked at the book. "Oh, no! Most of the patients are in bed and asleep by 10:30, and of course it's no use seeing a sleeping patient. He was almost an hour late last night."

At 10:20 Sylvester had left the Administration Building which agreed reasonably with his arrival at Hughes at 10:25.

At 10:17 there was the entry, "Dr. Thomas," and at 10:30, "Dr. Thomas started on his rounds." He remembered that Thomas was supposed to have called him that afternoon and had not done so.

"Who's Dr. Thomas?" he asked.

"Thomas? Oh, that's our expert on paranoia. He's quite brilliant, but—well—not much to talk to."

"Is he around?"

"Not yet, but—"

"If you see him before I do," said Prescott, "tell him to stay in his office. I'll be back to see him." He added, "How old is he? What does he look like?"

Mrs. Vreeland ran three fingers through her graying, but carefully waved, hair. "He looks quite nice—in a masculine way."

Prescott, with a sigh, decided it was unimportant anyway.

At 10:48 Dr. Lownds had come in, and Prescott recalled the record of his departure from Hughes, and the story he had told. He had left for the night at 10:52.

At 10:59 Dr. Winkler had come in.

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At 11:54 Richards had left, presumably in response to the news of Parisi's escape. He had returned at 12:10.

At 12:21 was the record of Prescott's own arrival.

At 12:25 was Winkler's departure.

At 12:35 Dr. Thomas had returned, and five minutes later had left for the night. He had, apparently, put in two hours on the grounds, probably an unhurried visitation in a number of places.

"This Dr. Sylvester," said Prescott, turning the record book to face Mrs. Vreeland again. "What's he like?"

"I hardly knew him," Mrs. Vreeland replied, "but I thought he was terribly queer, but then, genius is akin to madness, you know."

Prescott was getting tired of this description, but pressed for details. Mrs. Vreeland floundered. It might have been his looks, she thought, so skeleton-like with his deep-sunk eyes.

"You expected him to fall apart at the joints," she added.

Or it might have been the way he looked at you. "In a crowd he'd sit and shoot the strangest glances at whoever was talking. Why, sometimes he made me feel almost imbecilic!"

He was strange, too, in the way he got on with patients, and she resented his irritable disposition, his nervousness, and the way he got excited, sullen, or frightened.

"Frightened?" Prescott took up the word, sharply.

"Why, he was scared of his own shadow! It was a—a persecution mania, or something. I get so mixed up with these awful terms. He thought he was being

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followed—that someone was trying to cheat him out of his experiment."

"He actually thought someone was following him?" Prescott urged.

"He tried to point them out to me once. It was on the street car, and he kept glancing over his shoulder. I asked him what was wrong, and he said, 'I wanted to see if those two men were still there.'

"Well, of course, I asked him what men. He told me the two who had been following him, and I turned around to get a look at them. There were two of them, all right, dark persons, you know, and sinister, as you'd expect—but they weren't looking at us.

"I said, 'Nonsense, doctor, they're not even aware of you. One's reading a newspaper and the other's staring out of a window.'

"He looked at me out of those deep-set eyes of his and said, 'One of them's always reading a newspaper!'

"I said, 'Heavens! What a strange remark!' and it was!

"But he didn't even pause. He was saying, 'They don't look interested, but watch when I get out. They'll get up and follow. They've been doing it for two days now.'

"But when we got off at the hospital, of course they didn't."

Prescott said, frowning, "Did he ever mention it again?"

“Oh, yes! It was an obsession. It was only about two days later that he said, ‘Remember those two men I pointed out? They’re still after me. They’re closing in!’

“I said, ‘No!’ like that, pretending astonishment.

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“ ‘They want something,’ he said. ‘They follow me wherever I go. They spy on me at the laboratory. They’re out to get me!’ ”

“Did he tell anyone else about this?”

“Oh, yes. All the staff. We called them ‘Sylvester’s nemeses!’ ”

“You didn’t take them seriously?”

“Goodness, no! It was all too melodramatic for words. No—the doctor was just the suspicious type, that’s all. Mary Lou—that’s one of our nurses—says she doesn’t see how a woman could stand being engaged to such a suspicious man—meaning Kay Lewis, you know.”

Prescott took the change of subject in stride. “Suspicious, maybe; but a pretty good prospect for a girl.”

“Oh, he’d have gone a long way, I suppose, become famous—even wealthy, but think what a woman would have to put up with in the meantime. Quite aside from his being so queer, wouldn’t it be awful being married to a genius? Imagine knowing your husband was brighter than you!”

“You anticipated trouble between them?”

“I’m not one for that,” said Mrs. Vreeland. “But the doctor treated her as he treated every other girl around here. He’d pass her in the halls without a greeting, almost without seeing her. And she’s a girl who could have her choice of a hundred, too!”

“Who?” said Prescott sharply.

“Well, there’s Johnny Dennis, and that Loomis boy, just to name two right here in the hospital. I suppose she must have loved him, though. She probably saw things in him the rest of us couldn’t. Men

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unloosen to a surprising extent, don’t you think, when they’re alone with a girl?”

“Miss Lewis had no competition? No rivals?”

“Well,” said Mrs. Vreeland, “I’ve heard there were some who envied her, but I don’t know! Mary Lou used to say that James girl was mad about

him—”

“The James girl?”

“Leslie James. Did you ever hear such a name for a girl? Mary Lou says she looks at him with sheep’s eyes, but perhaps it’s just the natural worship of a nurse for a brilliant doctor. We all go through it. And then, of course, there was the case of that Rollins girl—or is it Robbins?”

“What was that?”

“Absolutely the silliest thing you ever heard. She’s from the University. She had a chance to work with the doctor, and she simply went crazy over him. She fairly clung! You couldn’t blame the poor man when he got rid of her. But now they say she’s pitiful! Men don’t realize!”

Prescott listened to her for half an hour more before he thanked her and left the building. She was a gossip, and valuable if he was careful to sort the grain from the chaff. There was a kernel or two in what she had said.

In the first place, every additional light on Sylvester showed a peculiar, unbalanced state of mind in recent weeks: these two men he had imagined following him; his fear of having his theory stolen.

As Winkler had pointed out, a theory can’t be stolen. It was silly. Theories must have the proof of figures and statistics before they are any good. And even if he tried to connect this with the notebook

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Winkler said was missing, it made no sense. The notebook had contained only a part of the figures—the paranoiac data—valueless without all the rest.

There seemed no rational explanation of Sylvester’s behavior.

Rational? Mrs. Vreeland had said, “Genius is akin to madness.” Was that more than a trite phrase? Had Sylvester passed the border-line? Cracked under the strain of overwork and excitement?

Winkler had used the phrases “persecution mania” and “cycles of mania and depression,” but both he and Richards had denied Sylvester was insane.

But, if he had deliberately freed Parisi—and it began to look as though he had—surely he must have been crazy!

It was in a thoughtful mood that Prescott crossed to Hughes.

In the back of his mind was the memory of Mat Loomis jumping to conclusions about Kay Lewis. Mrs. Vreeland had supplied an explanation by her chance reference to the man: Loomis might rank with Dennis as a

rival of Sylvester. The Captain, recalling his unfavorable impression of the fellow, decided to have a closer look.

Mat was in his alcove, reading. Prescott said, "Got a minute?"

Loomis glanced up. He said, "Yes, if you insist."

He removed his glasses, set the magazine aside, and motioned Prescott to a chair. Prescott liked him no better for the answer.

He plunged to the heart of the thing: "Mr. Loomis, you smiled last night when you learned of Dr. Sylvester's death."

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"Surely not! You must be mistaken, Captain!"

"What did you feel, then?"

"Surprise," said the other, which Prescott doubted. "Surprise and relief. You remember, I was worried about Miss Lewis."

"Know Miss Lewis well?"

"Casually."

"Rather good-looking woman."

"A very beautiful woman," returned Loomis with a satisfaction that Prescott resented instinctively.

"Connoisseur?" he asked acidly.

Mat made a little deprecatory gesture. "A beautiful woman is a beautiful woman to any man."

"Did you ever make a pass at her?" Prescott demanded, brutally direct because Loomis made him feel that way.

"How naive! With a beautiful woman near, you'd hardly expect me to do nothing, would you? But—a pass!"

"What then?"

"Must we—? But you're a policeman. One must expect this.... What did I do? I offered her flatteries, attentions, an emotional outlet that her fiancé would not—or could not—provide. Naturally, she responded."

Prescott, with sharpened attention, knew that he was listening to a repetition of Richards' diagnosis of the night before. He found himself looking at Loomis with speculative eyes.

The young man was proceeding amiably. "I have never been able to understand—even knowing women as I do—what attraction Dr. Sylvester had for Miss Lewis. I presume she imagined he would someday be

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rich and famous. He had everyone fooled, dangling before them the possibility of basking in his reflected glory. His ideas were ridiculous, of course, the product of a mind not entirely sane.”

Prescott brought him back to the point. “How far did the affair go?”

“No affair,” said Loomis, “unfortunately! You’ll hardly believe it, Captain: it stopped with the first kiss. She went cold in my arms. But she never trusts herself alone with me now. She knows I should prove dynamite to her emotions.”

“And how much do you desire that?”

The man’s eyes lighted, but he shrugged.

“How much do you desire it?” Prescott became more explicit: “Enough to put your obstacle—Dr. Sylvester—out of the way?”

Mat Loomis laughed. “But that’s ridiculous! After all, a woman is only a woman. Nothing to commit murder for. Naturally a policeman thinks in terms of melodrama, but, my dear Captain, disabuse yourself of the notion that I’m the villain pursuing the innocent maiden.”

He was very light about it, but murder is not a light matter to one accused of it. Lightness must cover worry. And Prescott was glad the man was worried.

The Captain had the highest respect for womanhood in general. The disillusioning business of a policeman kept him from idolizing them: they were nuisances; they could be vicious or dangerous. But, above all, they were the gentler sex, and should be so treated. Men like Mat Loomis left him fuming. They destroyed something, he felt, more valuable

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than property or human lives, though what it was they destroyed, he would have been hard put to explain.

On the other hand, men who prey on women, avoid violence with men. It was impossible to picture this pudgy person sticking a knife into Sylvester, but Prescott was experiencing an unaccustomed feeling: the desire to pin a crime on a particular person.

Highly reprehensible, of course.

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## CHAPTER XVI

### Rudolph, Crown Prince of the Porgos

GREGORY, the Sergeant who had been left in charge of the building, met the Captain as he reached the foyer.

"I got something that looks good, sir," he said. "A man on the third floor, opposite Parisi, heard something last night."

"One of the staff?"

"A patient."

Prescott's first impulse was not to see the man; his second to be thorough. But, following Gregory to room 311, he resolved not to be taken in again.

The patient was a Mr. Gwynd, an elderly little man, with a bald pate, trimmed around with a silky growth of snowy hair. Bernstein, his nurse, was present. Gregory went about his business.

"Good evening," said Mr. Gwynd. "You're the Captain to whom my friend Sergeant Gregory referred? Do sit down. I'm sorry I can't ask you to—draw up a chair."

Prescott took a seat uncomfortably.

"Your Sergeant," said Mr. Gwynd, "seemed to think you'd be interested in the voices I heard last night." It was an unfortunate choice of words, but Mr. Gwynd did not seem to notice. He interrupted himself: "I neglected to introduce my attendant, Mr.

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Bernstein—Mr. Leo Bernstein of Dubuque—who should be practicing law instead of taking care of invalids like myself—"

"I have met Mr. Bernstein," said Prescott. "Did you hear *him*?"

"I shouldn't have noticed him, I'm sure. One gets used to the nurses' voices. Anyway, it was a woman's voice."

"A woman's!"

"That surprises you? It would. This is a men's ward, and women don't come here very frequently. It surprised me, too. At first I thought it might be the queen of the Porgos, but after I'd listened a moment, I realized it was pitched too low for her Majesty, and besides, I couldn't see her anywhere."

Prescott leaned back, and passed a hand over his eyes. He thought, I might have guessed! Automatically he asked, "Who is the queen of the Porgos?"

"I should have remembered," smiled the little man. "You're no doubt a skeptic. One cannot see a Porgo without faith."

"And just what is a Porgo?"

"Why, everyone knows that," said Mr. Gwynd. "Most people can see them. They're very small, and they're everywhere. There are two of them on your left shoulder now, Captain Prescott, and they're laughing because you can't see them. All the Porgos in the room are laughing. That high-pitched, happy sound you hear is their laughter."

The Captain tried to keep from brushing his shoulder, but the impulse was not to be resisted. Mr. Gwynd sprang up in agitation. "Oh, please, Captain! You'll injure them. They can't stand such violence!"

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With an effort the hand was lowered. "I think I'd better go," Prescott said. "I'm disturbing you, Mr. Gwynd."

"Please, no!" urged the little man, hurriedly. "I'm taking too long. But you'll be interested. The voices couldn't have belonged to the Porgos. You see, Mathilda—she's the queen—has the lowest-pitched voice of all, but the one I heard was much lower still—almost human, in fact. I don't believe it came from the corridor; it was too muffled. I finally decided it came from the room across the hall—I never can remember the gentleman's name—he never could see the Porgos, either."

"Parisi," said Prescott wearily. "What was the woman saying?"

"Why, I'm sure I don't know. Is it important?"

"I suppose not," said the Captain.

"Because if it is, I'll send and find out. Some of the Porgos across the hall would know."

"Never mind," snapped Prescott hastily. "Who was she talking to?"

"Some men, I think. I didn't listen; they were human, of course, and anything human is boring, don't you think?"

"Couldn't you hear what the men said?"

"I'm afraid I'm an awfully poor witness," said Mr. Gwynd, apologetically. "I must have been frightfully lax. But then, I haven't had a great deal of practice eavesdropping. If you'd let me ask Rudolph, now, he'd know. Rudolph is always standing in keyholes, listening to things that

don't concern him, aren't you, Rudolph? He's always telling me intimate things

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about people I know—I'm afraid he has a rather dirty mind."

"Who is Rudolph?" Prescott couldn't stop the question.

"Rudolph is the crown prince," said Mr. Gwynd. "He's very young, and quite a devil with the ladies."

"And I suppose," snapped the Captain, "you're the king!" He regretted the remark; he knew it was going to backfire.

"Oh, no," said Mr. Gwynd, reprovingly. "The king is right over there in the purple robe, looking very insulted. I'm only the prime minister."

"I'll have to go," said Prescott, rising.

"I've enjoyed your visit a great deal, and so have the Porgos," said Mr. Gwynd. "I'm afraid you amuse them, Captain."

Prescott beckoned Bernstein to follow. The attendant was smiling. "I'm afraid the old gentleman isn't quite himself tonight," he said when they reached the hall. "Sometimes he won't mention the Porgos for a week. At other times, he talks of nothing else."

"Was it imagination? Does he hear voices? Women's voices?"

"He hears and sees things most of the time. But they're what we call systematized delusions. Mr. Gwynd has been here twenty years, and I understand that the Porgos were the same the day he arrived as they are now. There's a whole hierarchy of them from king to peasant. A world of his own, but not entirely dissociated from ours.

"As for women's voices, I'll say this, Captain: the sex angle isn't pointed in Mr. Gwynd's case. The remarks he made about Crown Prince Rudolph are

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as sexy as he gets. In other words, he isn't likely to imagine women's voices in particular."

"There's a chance he actually heard a woman in 310 last night? You were in the hall twice, Mr. Bernstein. Did you hear her?"

"No, sir," said Bernstein.

Prescott thanked him, and, with the help of Gregory, did some experimenting. He put the Sergeant in 310 with the door closed. From the

hall, Gregory could be heard when he talked loudly. From 311, he could not be heard unless he shouted. But this proved very little.

Prescott could not make up his mind whether Gwynd had heard or imagined a woman's voice.

"You're dealing with an insane asylum," Richards had said.

And truth, logic, and probability went by the board. All that counted was the working of warped minds. It left Prescott, to whose work truth and logic were fundamental, feeling hollow and uncertain. Warped minds were the doctor's business, not his.

Not until now.

## CHAPTER XVII

### Dr. Thomas

THE Captain had one more trying experience before he left Exeter that night: his interview with Dr. Thomas. Perhaps he had been putting undue hope in the doctor's mysterious figure, wandering so casually onto the very scene of the crime. At any rate, he had come to look forward to their meeting with more than usual interest.

But, run to earth at last in his office, Dr. Thomas proved to be an ineffectual youth with watery eyes and a trick of clearing his throat before answering questions.

He seemed to remember, rather vaguely, that someone had given him a message to call the Captain that afternoon, but (he said) it hadn't seemed important enough to bother about.

Prescott grimly explained why he had called.

Thomas hawked, gave a half gasp, half sigh, and said mildly, "You—ah—trying to connect me with—with what happened?"

"Not at all," Prescott returned. "I thought if you were at Hughes, you might have seen something important."

Thomas repeated vaguely, "I don't see well. Myopic, you know."

"Mind saying when you reached Hughes?"

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"I—guess not." He stopped to clear his throat. "But I—really couldn't say. I—don't know."

Deliberately patient, Prescott said, "Before eleven?"

"I—I doubt it," said Thomas.

"Well, how many patients did you see? What were their names?"

"I think that was the night I saw just one. Or was that Monday? No, I'm quite sure. Miss—ah—Mrs.— I forget the name. First floor—first room, or the second. She goes rigid."

"You saw her that night?"

"We sort of—of peeked in."

"Who was 'we'?"

"We? Oh—that must have been the nurse, Miss—all—Leavitt—no! Lewis. Leavitt is over in the other building. Most confusing."

“Did you go directly to this room—102, doctor?”

“Ah—erumph!—yes. 102. First thing, I’m sure.”

“Weren’t there messages for you at the desk?”

“I—guess there couldn’t have been. Funny, too!”

“Did you ask Mr. Dennis?”

“Dennis?—Dennis? Oh, the boy in the cage. I always get him mixed up with—with Zenowitz in the other building. Can’t think why.”

“Was he in the office?”

A sudden smile spread over Dr. Thomas’ face. “I do believe he wasn’t! I went to the cage, and he wasn’t there, and I thought, ‘He must be in the bathroom.’ ”

“But you didn’t wait?”

“I planned to see him on the way back.”

“And then you went down the corridor to 102,

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and you and Miss Lewis looked inside? How was the patient?”

“I really—what does it matter, anyway? I didn’t kill the man, you know. Or do you?”

“I’m just trying to get what happened at Hughes straight. I’ve been informed you and Miss Lewis stood talking. Is that right?”

“I seem to remember it. I think we discussed Mrs. What’s-her-name’s penchant for—ah—taking off her clothes. Miss Lewis—ah—”

“Lewis is right.”

“Thank you. Miss Lewis had some—some very—crackbrained scheme for stopping it. I—I seem to forget what; nothing we could use.”

“How long did you talk? Five minutes?”

“More, I think. I thought she was going to talk indefinitely.”

“As long as ten minutes?”

“It seemed longer, but—well, suppose we call it seven minutes. That—uh—splits the difference.”

“Very definite,” said Prescott. “How did it end?”

“Mrs. What’s-her-name woke up,” said Thomas with a sudden smile. “So I—excused myself and left Miss Leavitt to take care of her.”

“Miss Lewis went into 102?”

“Yes. But I—I didn’t stay. I went to another building.”

“How about the messages you were going to ask for?”

“The—ah—messages. Exactly. I did try to ask for them. And that—what’s-his-name?—Zenowitz—wasn’t there. I do remember! Funny, my remembering all these things.”

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“Was there anyone else in the office? Anyone or—anything?”

“No, I’m quite sure. I looked carefully. I had an idea tire fellow must be—be hiding. I can’t think why.”

“Do you know what time this was?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“Did you visit your other patients in the building?”

“No. Never—unless there are messages, Captain—ah—”

“Prescott.”

“Thank you. They’re up on the third floor. Awful effort. Two women. I dislike them very much.”

“You didn’t notice anything unusual while you were in the building? You know a patient escaped. You didn’t see him, by any chance? Or the man that was murdered—Dr. Sylvester?”

“Sylvester? I dislike him, too. I should have remembered. No—I—uh—didn’t see him, and I don’t look for—for patients. I hate patients. And I—ah—don’t notice things very much.”

“All right, doctor,” Prescott sighed. “I guess that’s all.”

Thomas, smiling benevolently, said, “Thank you! Always glad to help the—ah—the police, Captain—Captain Dennis.”

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## CHAPTER XVIII

### Co-ed

IN the paper next morning, Prescott read about his own inefficiency and how he was harrying innocent bystanders when he should have been out chasing Parisi. There was a good deal about invigorating effects of new blood, and the idea of investigation was more than hinted at. The Commissioner's opposition was making the most of its chance.

And it had the Commissioner worried.

"They're putting on the pressure, Louis," he said over the phone half an hour later. "The boss and the mayor have both called me. They say we can't afford a stink. We've got to get Parisi!"

Prescott got to work at last in a vicious mood.

Or tried to. It was one of those inevitable mornings when there seems to be nothing a man can get his teeth into. Leads had petered down to routine detail, which the police machine could take care of far more efficiently than any one man; it would turn up something for him in the course of time, but just now he was badly in need of a job.

He cast around like a hound looking for a scent, and finally came up with the note, which he had completely forgotten, reminding him to call Kay Lewis. It was early in the morning again, but she

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had not been working the night before, of course; Prescott thought she might be reached.

Her voice, over the telephone, was cool, completely cut off from emotion, and she answered questions with an impersonal readiness, recalling Dr. Lownds' visit, the patient's accident, her trip to the surgery, and Dr. Thomas' visit. She had met him shortly after eleven, just as she left 103, and they had talked in the corridor about ten minutes. Then 102 had wakened, and she had gone to her. Dr. Thomas had departed. She had not left 102 until Wiese's arrival.

"When you visited the surgery, Miss Lewis, did you lock the door behind you?" Prescott asked.

"No. I just pushed it shut with my foot."

"When did you relock it?"

“Not until the search. I intended to when I left 103, but Dr. Thomas and then the patient interrupted. It was the first place I thought of when I heard of the escape, and I hurried there, made sure Parisi wasn’t inside and locked it.”

“Returning the key to the office?”

“No. To Johnny Dennis.”

Prescott said hurriedly, “I want to talk with you about this. Could you meet me at Millar’s for a late luncheon. Bring Miss James, if you like. At two.”

He wondered if she realized how her carelessness had helped the murderer of her fiancé.

The talk had added little, however, to what he already knew, and it left him with no more to do than he had had before. He sat drumming with his fingers on the desk, thinking about Sylvester. He was thinking how much he had heard about the man without turning up an honest-to-God motive for the

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murder; and yet, if his theorizing were sound, someone had used Parisi’s escape as a chance to settle an old grudge.... A grudge ...

And not a thing to show that there was any grudge.

The answer to that was to learn more about Sylvester, and suddenly it occurred to him that there was one man who had known the doctor very well with whom he had not talked: Professor Bertram Schlosser of the University’s Psychology Department.

He knew Schlosser casually; knew that he was working on a book during the summer months, and would probably be in his office.

With quick decision, born of his need to get going, he picked up his hat, left Headquarters, and found himself a cab. He had no trouble finding Schlosser, a tall, lean man in his thirties, whose loud, exclamatory, lecture-hall voice became surprising in the confines of an office. The professor had the habit of staring at people with unconscious intensity, rather as though they were specimens in which manifestations of psychology might appear at any time.

He was emphatically, impersonally, vocal in his regrets.

“Promising chap, Sylvester! Very!” he said. “His murder’s the most shocking thing I’ve ever heard of—chiefly because I can’t see why it happened—didn’t know he had an enemy in the world!”

“What about this fellow he’s been working with? Any trouble there?”

“Winkler? Never heard of any! Steady chap, isn’t he? Wife—children? Not the killer type.”

“But cool.”

“Oh—yes! I see what you mean! But -what motive?”

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Prescott told him.

Schlosser stared fixedly, his Hitler mustache twitching slightly. Then he said, “Maybe! Don’t know the man very well. Who else is there? His fiancée, of course! Normal, attractive, as I remember her. Did a lot for Bert! Fell in love with him, too, for which she’s probably been sorry a hundred times.”

“Why?”

“Bert’s attitude! Idealized women! Thought they’d break like glass if you touched them!”

“I’d gathered he was a little shy—not much sex—”

“True! But he was a man like all the rest of us. That •wasn’t the root of his attitude toward the Lewis girl.”

“What, then?”

“Why, it’s obvious! They were next door neighbors as children. She cottoned to him when others didn’t. Gave him understanding, sympathy! Made his decisions for him—like coming here to college. Came with him! In short, she mothered him!”

“I’d understood that,” said Prescott, sounding meek beside the professor’s firm baritone, “but—”

“Why—he looked at her as he would at a mother or a sister. It made her—untouchable!”

“Oh,” said the Captain, suddenly getting the picture. “I hadn’t got that angle. That certainly isn’t the way she feels.”

“Oh, no! She loved him—for his weaknesses, I presume. When he grew out of them, she was proud: her success! So she acknowledges her love, forces an engagement!”

“And when the engagement drags out for two years—?”

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“Dilemma!” said Schlosser, as Richards had done. “Anything could happen.”

“Including murder?”

Schlosser’s mustache twitched in the silence that followed. Then he said, “It’s possible.... However—understand I’ve made no study of the girl; don’t take this even as a considered opinion—but my guess is she’d let off steam by going on a sex spree with someone else.”

“You wouldn’t consider a motive of jealousy on her part?”

“No! Nonsense! Bert wouldn’t look at another woman. Any woman! Take that Rollins girl. What did he do with her? Kicked her out!”

“Rollins? Someone’s mentioned that name. Who is she?”

“Alice Rollins? Well, she’s been a student: just graduated. But she’s going to end up in Exeter. Perfect schizophrenic!”

“What had she to do with Sylvester?”

“She heard a lot about him. We boast a little, you know! Heard how brilliant he was. Got the idea of following in his footsteps. Hero-worship. Turned to love when she met him.”

“I remember. Mrs. Vreeland mentioned her,” said Prescott. “She helped with an experiment, didn’t she?”

The professor nodded. “She’s another that’s got scars from childhood. Plain! No social life. No men! Emotionally repressed. So when she fell in love, she didn’t know what to do about it! Threw herself at him, and got kicked out!”

“What did that do to her?”

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“Left her abnormal, violent! Still hangs around following him—that kind of thing. Wouldn’t go home this summer, I hear. Stayed at her sorority to be closer to him.”

Here was the first temperament that matched seven or eight stab wounds! Prescott took her address.

“One thing more,” he added. “Have you seen Sylvester recently?”

“Several times in the last few weeks.”

“I’ve heard him described as queer. Have you noticed anything?”

Schlosser laughed. “The boy was a genius, Captain! ”Which is to say, he was ahead of his time. Some day we’ll all understand fundamentals well enough to handle patients as he did. Naturally a man raised out of the ruck far enough to see fifty or seventy-five years ahead is noticeable. Human nature being what it is, we say ‘eccentric,’ ‘queer,’ ‘mad!’ ... Don’t believe it for a moment!”

“Maybe not,” said Prescott stubbornly, “but how do you account for his depression and—”

“Very easily! I was bothered at first, but Winkler phoned me about a notebook that’s missing. Obviously Bert lost it. Eight months’ to a year’s work to do over! Who wouldn’t be depressed?”

“Oh!” said Prescott. Once again he had missed an evident connection! He rallied to ask about the persecution mania, and the two mysterious men.

“Imagined them!” returned Schlosser. “Strain—overwork, worry.... But his worry wasn’t of anyone stealing actual material—like the notebook. That was all jottings; not even an expert could have made

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head or tail of them without the memory of the events to which they referred.”

“Of what, then?”

“Of someone publishing a similar paper before his could be written. So many experiments go on simultaneously. Any creative person fears someone else may be working on the same idea somewhere else. I do it myself.”

And so, thought Prescott, leaving the professor’s office, and starting on the short walk to Alice Rollins’ sorority, there went his theory of Sylvester’s insanity!

The sorority presented the desolate, gutted appearance of a college building in the summer. The porch echoed under the Captain’s feet.

A flabby, work-roughened woman with straggling gray hair and abundant bosom answered his ring, announcing without preamble, “Ye’ve got the wrong place, mister. There ain’t nubuddy here in the summer.”

“Miss Alice Rollins?”

“Oh—Rollins? Well, she won’t see you if she’s like she was yesterday. She has her moods, that girl, and when she’s in one of ’em, you couldn’t sell her a thing!”

She ushered him into a large room that must have taken up three quarters of the main floor, and the Captain took a chair while she waddled off upstairs, one hand hiking up her ankle-length skirt, the other pulling industriously at the railing.

Rapid generations of vigorous young ladies had left their mark. It was a cosmopolitan mark, including the ancient upright piano and the very modern

radio and the sorority plaque over the fireplace. Part of it was the *Theory of Cosmic Philosophy* standing between heavy iron bookends on the table, and part of it was the bruised, mis-matched furniture and the rich carpet with the dozen worn places half hidden under studiously placed stands.

Prescott liked it. He liked the comfort, ease, and informality that it typified, the friendships, and the good times. He was aware, as he not always was, of having missed something. The Captain had not gone to college.

Alice Rollins stood before him, and he got to his feet with uneasy haste. "I hope I'm not intruding," he said.

"What do you want?" Her eyes were large, emphasized by a thin, angular face. Of all her features, only the lips were soft, and they seemed ready to tremble at the slightest excuse.

"Won't you sit down?"

She seemed poised for flight, standing at the foot of the stairs. Prescott had thought of hers as a temperament that matched seven or eight stab wounds, but seeing her changed his mind. This girl was thin, and physically frail. There was a nervous, twisting movement of her narrow shoulders as she sat.

He said, "I want to ask some questions about Dr. Sylvester."

It was as though he had turned on a tap. The big, dark eyes glistened and filled, and, before the girl buried her head in her arms, Prescott saw them overflow.

He was used to waiting for tears, but he was always afraid of a woman using them as an excuse to escape.

The moment the crying lessened, he said, "You knew him pretty well?"

She said, "You needn't think you can come in here and insult him! I won't have him ridiculed!"

The voice was soft and fluttering, but it sent a nasty cold shock through Prescott. The look of hatred in her eyes amazed him. He had had his next question ready, but for the life of him, he couldn't think of it now.

She added, her tone less stressed: "Of course I knew him well. I worked with him for four and a half months, though I haven't seen him to speak to since the sixth of June. Why shouldn't I know him well?" She said, as an

afterthought, "But I don't know anything about his death. I wasn't out. I wasn't near the place!"

"Of course. I wanted general information. But if you haven't seen him for a month and a half, you probably wouldn't know—"

"I haven't spoken with him since the sixth of June. It's all perfectly clear. We were discussing the effect of temperature on reaction time. It was a beautiful day."

"You were working together?"

"He was very enthusiastic over his progress. Very happy. It made me happy, too."

There was a time when Prescott would simply have given her up as a bad job. It spoke well for his progress in abnormal psychology that he stuck with his task. He was getting used to abnormal people.

He asked, "You thought a lot of Dr. Sylvester, didn't you?"

"Who wouldn't? He was a genius. He was a man

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who was doing big things. But he was a filthy, cold-blooded brute. You wouldn't believe some of the things he tried to do to me!"

Prescott swallowed what was on the tip of his tongue, and asked instead, "What did he try to do?"

"A decent girl couldn't tell you," said Alice Rollins. "He tried to make me take off my clothes. He ran his hands all over me. You wouldn't think a genius would do a thing like that."

Prescott said tentatively, "Naturally you resented that."

"I've always been a decent girl, Mr.— What did you say your name was? I don't think I know you. I won't have strangers insulting Dr. Sylvester! I'll report you. I'll call the police!"

Hastily, Prescott introduced himself.

Then he said, "You knew the doctor was engaged to someone else?"

The girl, her knuckles white on the chair-arms, demanded abruptly, "What did she have in common with Bert? What did she know of psychology? ... Bert needed someone who understood him, someone to work at his side. He couldn't have been satisfied with an insipid, stupid little thing like that Lewis girl!"

"Did the doctor love her?"

Her face flaming, she leapt to her feet. "I'm not going to answer any more questions. I won't have you insulting Bert. You can insult me, but I'm

not going to stand your insinuations!”

Prescott tried to interrupt: “When did you meet him?”

It was ineffectual. “If you want to find out anything

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about him, why don’t you talk to Lewis? She doesn’t know anything, but she’ll tell you what you want.”

“I wanted to go to a person who knows,” said Prescott with what he considered great tact. “You know more than she. What happened on the sixth of June?”

It was as though he had struck her behind the knees. She sat down, her face twisting. Prescott insisted: “He told you you couldn’t work with him any more, didn’t he?” She nodded. “Why not?”

She said, after a moment, “He was afraid of himself. An engaged man. I don’t think he could trust himself—close to me—any more. So he sent me away.” It was sincere, the truth to her.

“Have you seen him since?”

“I’ve seen him. How could I help it?”

“Where?”

“I took long walks. If I got near the hospital, I’d go in. Sometimes I’d see him.”

“Did you ever see anyone following him?”

The girl’s face darkened. “Yes! Women followed him sometimes on the street. I’ve noticed them when I walked with him. They’d see him, and turn and follow. There was quite a crowd sometimes.”

“Ever any men?”

“I don’t notice men much. Men paw you. That’s why I don’t go out with them. It isn’t because I’m not asked.”

“Tuesday night,” said Prescott, no longer thrown off his stride by digressions, “were you at the hospital?”

“I wasn’t outside this house. I told you that before.

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You’re getting insulting again. You’re very rude.”

“A policeman has to be rude sometimes,” Prescott said, “but I wasn’t insulting you; I wasn’t suspecting you. You were in love with a brilliant man, and he with you.”



Anger flamed darkly in her eyes. "Brilliant!" she said sullenly. "Brilliant about how long it takes to answer 'chair' to 'table!' Brilliant about electric lights and mechanical switches, but not so damn brilliant about his own reactions." The sullenness vanished. "Love! I was in love with him? I hated him! And he wasn't in love with me, either! He wasn't in love with anything but his God damned silly apparatus!"

She was on her feet. The Captain was conscious of a hollow, helpless sensation as he watched her, crouched over, her face suffused. She was unpredictable.

"I didn't kill him," she said, "but I've dreamt him dead, and I've dreamt of killing him, too; dreamt of striking his insulting words dead on his lips! He was a cold-blooded, mechanical animal! Do you hear? He didn't know what a woman was. I used to beat at him—beat at him—beat—"

Prescott was used to catching blows. He caught the girl's arm in mid-air, closed his fingers on her wrist. He started to say, "Take it easy!" but Alice Rollins suddenly screamed, and wrenched free.

She went on screaming. "You take your hands off me! Stay away! You're like all the rest. Don't touch me!"

Her hand fell on the heavy iron bookends on the

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table behind her, and abruptly her tone changed. "I'll get you for this!" she cried. "You think you can attack a woman and get away with it—"

Prescott thought she was going to throw it, but she didn't. She brought it with her, and the Captain took the blow on his shoulder, falling away so that it glanced off. The weapon rose again, and as Prescott closed with the sobbing, fighting girl, the heavy weight missed his head by an inch. Her arm struck his shoulder, and the shock of it jarred the weapon loose. It fell with a thud.

Prescott felt her hot breath in his face, her raking fingernails on his cheek, and her sharp-toed shoes against his shins, and then he was alone, staring after the retreating, stumbling legs that were vanishing from view up the staircase.

He looked down at the bookend and said, "Whew!"

Then he glanced up and saw the stout figure of the woman who had admitted him standing in the kitchen doorway.

Louis Prescott flushed brick red.

“Lord A’mighty!” said the woman. “It sounded like you was assaultin’ her!”

Prescott felt it as well to reveal his badge. “I was asking her a few questions. She seemed to resent them.”

“Well, sure an’ I thought she’d laid you out with that iron thing!”

“It was close,” said Prescott, feeling of his shoulder where the blow had struck. “I should apologize. I—I assure you there was—”

“Law!” said the woman with a flap of her hands ceilingwards. “I heard the whole of it. That is to say,”

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she amended, “after the little lady raised her voice.”

“Thanks,” said Prescott, frankly grateful. “I was afraid you’d just heard ... you’d misunderstand—”

The woman shook her head. “I’ll warrant you’re not the first she’s embarrassed like that, and for no reason, either. She’s always getting into tantrums. I steer clear of her meself.”

“She doesn’t seem quite normal,” said Prescott mildly.

“I’ve thought that at times, too! She’s forever doing strange things, losing her temper without reason. And a filthy mind she’s got! Some of the things I’ve heard her say would of put a stop to my Mike. And yet from other things, I’ll be tellin’ you, she’s more innocent than you’d think. She’s virgin as sure as you’re a policeman, mister, though my Mike won’t believe it. He won’t believe but what she picks up men on the streets nights when she’s walking, but I’m a woman. I know what’s wrong with her.”

“She takes night walks?” Prescott picked up the phrase.

“Sure, and she’s been at it for six months, more or less. Night after night, rain or shine, and where she goes, I’m sure I wouldn’t know, though my Mike says he can guess.”

“Does she still do it?”

“Every night,” nodded the woman. “Leaves at ten, and is back by twelve—which is closing hour during the school year.”

“Ten to twelve,” said Prescott, repressing excitement. “She told me she wasn’t out Tuesday night. What would you say to that?”

“Law! The girl couldn’t tell the truth in a church.

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Tuesday night? Night before last, that was? Sure, that was the night she came in and ran upstairs like the devil was after her. Generally she'll moon at a window on comin' in, but I heard her meself, and noticed it for that same reason. Ran upstairs, she did, and slammed her door so it shook the house. A murderin' temper I would have said she was in, mister, to guess from the sound."

## CHAPTER XIX

### Luncheon Date

“I SUPPOSE,” said Katherine Lewis, meeting the Captain’s eyes coolly, “this is a ruse to question me?”

“But a thoughtful one, for a policeman,” Leslie James put in.

“To be quite frank,” said Prescott, “I’m close to a dead end, and you’re the natural one to turn to. It’s off the record, if you like.”

They sat at the table in Millar’s. The waiter had just departed, and Prescott was conscious of rising tension as Kay Lewis herself brought up the subject that had been in the minds of all three.

She was quite composed, level-eyed, surrounded and protected by that perfection of appearance and manner that Prescott had noticed at their first meeting. It was an armor that Bert Sylvester as well as the asylum might have had a hand in building.

Beside her, Leslie James seemed ingenue. There was an excitement in her eyes that Prescott, hating to believe her sensation-seeking, was at a loss to explain. Her shifts between flippancy and gravity were disconcerting and more difficult to read than the deliberate coolness of the other girl.

Prescott asked, “Do you believe Parisi killed Dr. Sylvester?”

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“I’m sure he didn’t,” said Kay Lewis. “I’m sure Bert had nothing at all to do with the escape.”

“And if he had,” said Leslie James, “he could have handled Parisi. Bert was splendid with patients. He could control them even in their most violent moods.”

“Is that cold fact, or exaggeration?” Prescott asked bluntly.

“Fact. I’ve good reason to know: one afternoon back in April, when I was on a day shift, I was just returning to Hughes when a patient tried to escape. This Mr. Muldoon, a big, six-foot giant of a man, had been out walking with two of his attendants. Well, it turned out that a carpenter, doing repair work, had left an iron bar—a pinch-bar, I think it’s called.—lying in the grass. Muldoon saw it. I wasn’t fifty feet away when he stooped and picked it up. The attendants didn’t realize what he was up to until it was too late. He stood looking at them, that bar looking like a

toothpick in his hand, and you could see the idea growing in his mind that he could use it to kill with, and to escape. He looked at those two attendants, and then he looked at me, and I was on the path, right in his way if he made a break for it.

“Then one of the attendants moved, and it released a spring. Muldoon growled like an animal, and leapt for the man. I don’t think I’ll ever forget the way the poor fellow howled. The second attendant didn’t wait, and neither did I, but in starting to run, I tripped on the edge of the path, and fell.

“Maybe you’ve had nightmares where you’re powerless to avert disaster. You can’t run. You can’t lift an arm to defend yourself. You sit in a semi-paralysis that is all the more horrible because it isn’t complete.

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I had that experience in waking life. I couldn’t get up. And when he started to lift that pinch-bar, I tried to scream, and I couldn’t even do that.

“And then someone stepped over me. It was Bert, and I can repeat word for word what he said. I’ll never forget. He said, ‘You want to watch out for your heart, Mr. Muldoon. You’ll strain it.’

“The man stopped within arm’s reach of us, the bar raised. Bert said, ‘You remember what the doctor told you about excitement. You’d better give me that thing in your hand.’

“Muldoon stood growling in his throat. He said, ‘Get out of my way, or I’ll bash your head in!’

“Bert said, ‘Don’t be childish. If you don’t behave, you’ll not be allowed to walk outside any more! Give me that thing!’

“And Muldoon gave it to him, too, and went back into the hospital hanging his head and pleading with Bert not to report his being bad.” The girl paused before adding, “And that’s the kind of a man that couldn’t handle Parisi!”

Prescott, who had already made up his mind about Parisi, was interested in that story for another angle. Like an echo, he remembered Mrs. Vreeland gossiping: “Mary Lou says she looks at him with sheep’s eyes, but perhaps it’s just the natural worship of a nurse for a brilliant doctor. We all go through it.” Firmer foundations than that, apparently.

They were served, and when the waiter had gone, Prescott said, “What Miss James says bears out what I’ve felt. That Parisi was framed.”

“Must you assume that?” asked Kay Lewis. “It’s so inhuman!”

"There's no other way to explain the facts. You see, there was no struggle." Briefly, he outlined his argument. Kay listened with apparent calm, but put down her fork to conceal the trembling of her hand.

She said, "There might be—some other explanation."

And Leslie James said, "What about a quarrel?"

"A quarrel would explain the nature of the wounds, but it *emphasizes* the lack of struggle. Besides, no quarrel was heard. If it were violent enough to end in murder, it would have been. Miss Lewis screamed Tuesday night. Nobody did anything about it, that being the nature of the place, but it was remembered later by Mat Loomis, to mention one. It would have been so with a quarrel."

"What are you looking for then?" asked Leslie James.

"Motive, first."

Both girls were silent. Finally, with an effort, Miss Lewis said, "There was none. I've tried to think. There was no motive."

"There must have been if we rule out Parisi. I'm going to mention four names. I'd like your reactions."

"Okay," said Leslie James, "let's see whom we can condemn." Kay's eyes rose in protest, but she said nothing. "Who's first?"

"Dr. Winkler."

Neither girl, it seemed, knew Winkler well enough to speculate.

"What about Johnny Dennis?"

Miss James laughed. "I can't see Johnny as a murderer. He's the last one to have a reason."

"To remove a rival," Prescott suggested.

There was an unexpected and uncomfortable silence. Leslie James looked at Kay, and Kay, the Captain thought, looked faintly flushed. She started to say something, stopped, and finally began again.

"I suppose you'll draw the wrong conclusions if I don't tell you," she said. "Johnny Dennis proposed to me last night."

"And you—?"

"Told him he was in very bad taste.... However—eventually—I'll probably marry him." She said it defiantly, daring him to disapprove. She added, "If there were anyone else to turn to ... but I can't stand it alone."

Johnny is an old friend. We were both friends of Bert. It seems natural to turn to each other.”

The waiter interrupted.

It was difficult, Prescott thought, not to draw the obvious conclusion: Johnny was the first to benefit from the murder.

But had the result been sure enough to warrant the risk?

When the waiter had gone, Prescott proposed his third name: Mat Loomis.

Leslie James said, “Why Mat? He’s nice, amusing. I didn’t know he had any connection with Bert.”

“And you, Miss Lewis?”

“I knew him, of course.”

“Ever go out with him?”

Her chin came up. “I suppose you disapprove of that, too,” she said. “Well, Bert knew about it.”

“All I want is facts.” Prescott was mild. “Mat ever get fresh?”

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘fresh.’ He never

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did anything I resented, if that answers your question.”

“It does, under the circumstances.”

She flushed, and let the pause rest until she could reply collectedly. Then she said, “Mat Loomis gave me a very good time, Captain Prescott. But a good time isn’t everything. If I could have had it, and Bert, too, that would have been heaven, but I wanted Bert more than anything else. I want you to believe that.”

“What was Loomis’ attitude toward Sylvester?”

Leslie James said breathlessly, “Contemptuous. He claimed Bert’s idea was a dream—an insane dream, he used to call it.”

Prescott, aware of an under-surface excitement in her that he could not account for, said, “So he told me. What did he know about it? He isn’t a psychologist, is he?”

“He quoted Winkler,” said Leslie. “They were cronies, you know, before the doctor got married.”

The Captain took a pause on that. If Winkler had expressed such ideas before Sylvester’s death, perhaps he was sincere in his estimate of the doctor’s theory. If so, it minimized motive.

On the other hand, he might have been very foresighted.

Too, this suggested an alliance between someone inside Hughes, and another outside, a theory which might explain several things.

Prescott mentioned his final name: Alice Rollins.

Miss Lewis said, "Rollins?" in puzzled fashion, and then, "Oh—wasn't that the girl that helped Bert for a while?"

"Low comedy character," said Leslie, with a return

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of the flippancy that Prescott neither liked nor understood. "She stuck so close, Bert practically carried her pick-a-back."

"She was quite pitiful, if I remember," said Kay seriously. "It was a sort of hero-worship, I think."

"She's no murderer," said Miss James. "Frail, timid—"

Prescott said, "Yes. I've met her.... Nevertheless, I wonder if either of you ever heard of her making an attack on the doctor?"

Neither had.

Then Prescott, not wishing to discuss possible motives of present company, turned to another question.

"I understand," he said, "that for something like a month, Dr. Sylvester hasn't been himself. An unstable emotional or nervous condition. I wonder how he's seemed to you?"

Leslie James, grave again, waited for her companion to reply. Kay took her time. Presently: "he's been under a strain—you know how it is when the end of a long job is in sight. I've tried to tell him he was overworking. I was worried for fear he might have a breakdown. He was going beyond his strength."

"How, exactly, did he act?"

He heard again the description of the persecution mania, the depression, the final extreme moods.

When the girl had finished, he said, "These men following him, Miss Lewis. Did you ever see them?"

"He tried to point them out several times, but I may not have seen the ones he meant. Certainly they never looked twice the same. I'm sure it was his imagination."

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Leslie James said, "But perhaps—considering his murder—he didn't imagine them."



Professor Schlosser had suggested strain. So had Kay Lewis. But suddenly Prescott knew that he had overlooked another obvious explanation: that the men following Sylvester had been real!

He thought, I'm getting old. I don't see things any more.

It was a possibility that opened a whole new field. It suggested people and motives as yet unconsidered.

He said, "That's possible. It's possible, too, there was good cause for his depression: the loss of an important notebook."

Kay's eyes widened. "Notebook? ... I do remember his telling me that the men had closed in; he was sure they had taken a notebook. And that was just at the beginning of his depression!"

Prescott nodded. So much for the insanity theory! There remained only those rapid cycles of elation and despondency, and he had the uneasy feeling that this was as obvious as the others if he could only see it.

The waiter cleared their places.

Leslie James said, "I've a theory—a rather disturbing one. You see, a brook runs through the grounds not two hundred yards from Hughes. The murderer could have reached it in the darkness, washed at leisure, and hidden the knife permanently. Instead he runs the risk of the lavatory. Why? Unless he dared not leave Hughes? That would mean one of our staff."

"There's more than that to point to the Hughes staff," said Prescott, and told her about the fingerprints.

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"Doesn't that rule out outsiders, then?"

"Only in theory. Because the murderer might have intended it to look that way ... if the murder was planned. And it might have been."

"Then what about the framing of Parisi?"

"That may have been the inspiration of the moment, rather imperfectly combined with the original plan."

"That's horribly complicated," said Leslie James. "I don't believe it. It was someone in Hughes, and that would mean Kay or I or—"

"Or Johnny Dennis, or Mat Loomis. I've found nobody else even remotely connected with the doctor."

"That leaves me highly uncomfortable," said Leslie James, with a return to flippancy. "It's got a little something on the sword of Damocles, because you don't really know whether you're sitting under it or not!"

She got to her feet suddenly, her frappé only half finished. She said, “Kay, dear, I’ve had enough. If we stay much longer, the Guilty Finger points to us. So what do you say? A little shopping?”

Kay Lewis said, “I’m sorry, Captain Prescott. I am feeling a little done in. You’ll excuse me, I’m sure.”

And before the Captain could protest, Leslie James had swept her out. Prescott sat back, bewildered. What had he said?

Well, he thought, you never can tell about women! They move in ways as mysterious as the Lord’s!

## CHAPTER XX

### The Flaw in the Alibi

“NO sign of Parisi,” said Sergeant Dugan. “We been looking for his body all day, but we can’t even find that.”

“You will,” said Prescott with conviction. “Whoever’s got him can’t afford to turn him loose.”

“Then I wish he’d get it over with. We’re in for trouble if he don’t.”

“Why?”

“The papers are talking about a shake-up. They got a whole page of letters complaining about the police, see? All from a bunch of dopes that wouldn’t know a burglar from an arsonist, but they coulda done better. They coulda laid hands on Parisi in twenty-four hours. They coulda saved the lives of innocent women and children— Hell, let’s issue a statement that Parisi only kills men.”

“Sounds like people are getting restless.”

“And then some! What did they do but hoot at me down in the Italian quarter today? Somebody threw a rock, and you shoulda heard what they said! There’s little bunches going around with rope. They’re going to lynch Parisi. And they’re talking big about the cops not being able to stop ’em. They say the cops couldn’t stop their noses running! It’s getting on the boys’ nerves.”

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“We’ll take special precautions about guarding him, if we get him alive,” said Prescott. “Let’s forget him a minute. What about Stephani and the alibi?”

“Well, I told you this Spinucci was clean, and I still think he is!” The Sergeant’s face was heavy. “But it might justa been,” he amended with a twinkle of triumphant amusement in his eyes, “that those three Valentinos put one over on him.”

“How?”

“There’s plenty ‘if’s,’ ” said Dugan. “The first one is this: if all three of them was in it together—Stephani, Luciano, and Spiello—” The Sergeant added parenthetically, “I couldn’t figure no way for Stephani to do it alone

...

“Get on!”

“I talked with lots of people that know Spinucci. They won’t say much against him. He’s always doing favors for somebody, like keeping his place open late, and he’s got lots of friends ...

“For the love of God,” said Prescott, “get on!”

“But they agree that after a hard day, along about eleven, Spinucci likes to drag out a bottle of some old Chianti he’s got and go to work on it.”

“Yes?” said Prescott, sitting up a little straighter.

“It’s a habit, see?” said the Sergeant. “If anyone’s there, he’ll go on drinking till they leave. And after about the second glass, he dozes.”

“Dozes?”

“A sort of snooze. He wakes up every little while to take another swallow or two, and you gotta remember: he ain’t asleep. Some say he just sits with his eyes closed; and everybody admits he wakes up when anyone comes or goes. He himself won’t admit

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he sleeps. In other words, it’s lousy evidence if you have to use it in court. He stays sober as a churchman, they tell me. It just makes him dozey.”

“That’s very clever,” said Prescott. “If Spinucci won’t admit he dozed that night, we’re still in a mess.”

“I told you there was plenty ‘if’s,’ sir. If the three were in it together, if Spinucci drank wine that night, if he dozed off, and if they could have sneaked out quiet enough, why *maybe* we’ve broken the alibi.”

“Dugan,” said Prescott, “as far as I’m concerned, it is broken, and good work, too.”

“Should we haul ’em in?”

“We need more evidence first. Make sure they don’t leave town, of course, but don’t let ’em know we’ve found a foothold.”

“Yes, sir,” said Dugan, looking disappointed. “And next?”

“Next—a motive. We’ve got to connect Toscarello with the Parisi. Have those dossiers been worked up?”

“They’re being typed now,” said Dugan. “I was looking them over. They haven’t found any connection.”

“So?” said Prescott. “What did they find out?”

“Well, this Toscarello was born August 8, 1891, making him 45. The parents had settled here six or eight months before. Luigi was their first child, and the only one who lived. There was a daughter, born blind, who

died before she was five, and there was a third child, stillborn. The mother died in 1916, apparently of the flu, and the father went to Italy early in the war and never came back.”

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Prescott, feeling that he was close to something important, said, “What about Toscarello himself?”

“Our first record of him was his conviction for the rape of a high school girl back in 1912. He got out of prison in 1920—”

“Eight years?” said Prescott grimly. “Criminal!”

“It was,” said Dugan. “Pretty soon he spent six months more in prison on liquor counts, and went free again in ’23. We had him for a hold-up in ’27, but couldn’t make it stick.”

“Any further sex crimes?” asked Prescott, an idea hammering at his consciousness.

“Uh-h ... no proof,” said Dugan draggingly. “He was sued by a girl in 1928 for support of a child she claimed was his. And lost. He lived with a Rose Ascuilio, a waitress in his restaurant, the last of plenty, I judge; and if the vice boys are to be believed, he owned a house and was a white slaver and God knows what else. But try and prove it.”

“Finances?”

“What books he kept show a profit, but not enough to account for the money people say he had.”

“And no mention of any of the Parisi?” insisted the Captain.

Dugan shook his head. “The name doesn’t show anywhere. None of the employees ever saw the Parisi or ever heard their name mentioned at the restaurant.”

“And nothing showed up from an investigation of the Parisi?”

“No, sir.”

“Well, keep the boys at it. I still think they’ll find one.”

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“Want me to get on it myself, sir?”

“No. You concentrate on Stephani, Dugan. We’ve got to put him on the scene of the crime. Go back to Quarry Street and interview all those witnesses again, with him in mind.”

Dugan sighed and said, “Yes, sir.”

“There was a negro janitor,” added Prescott, “who told about the murderer walking up Quarry from First, meeting Toscarello at the alley entrance, and taking a poke at him.”

“Yeah,” said Dugan.

“Remember why that darky noticed the man?”

“Something about a shirt.”

“Um! ... Well, he noticed that shirt before the murder, before he got excited. And it’s a typical thing for a nigger to notice. What was it? Blue and yellow or some such God-awful combination? The kind of thing Stephani might wear for calling on the Estis. Check with them, too.”

“It’s a thought, anyway,” nodded Dugan.

“I should have paid more attention at the time,” Prescott said, “but I was trying to put Joseph on the scene, in his blue serge and his plain white shirt. A colored shirt was just cockeyed. Now it’s a lead. Look up that darky and check the description. Then hop over to Parisi’s and see if you can find it. Probably he’s got rid of it, but there’s a chance.”

When Dugan had gone, Prescott sat telling himself it was foolish trying to connect Stephani with the crime without motive or evidence. And the fact that the alibi might not be sound was another of those facts that were not facts.

Yet he was convinced he was on the right track.

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If so, Stephani would know his brother’s whereabouts. Prescott played with the idea of pulling him in and trying a bluff, but he knew Stephani would laugh at him. It was better to wait for proof.

The Captain was on the verge of going to supper when he was summoned to the telephone. It was an echo of Tuesday night when he heard the faintly foreign voice of Richards saying, “Louis?”

Aware of tensing muscles, he said, “Yes, Doc?”

“I thought it might interest you to know, Louis,” the doctor said, “that the notebook Winkler reported missing has been returned.”

“Returned!” repeated Prescott. “Who returned it?”

“Mr. Dennis just brought it in.”

“Ask him to wait. I’d like to talk to you both.”

There was no car available, so the Captain took a taxi. He reached the hospital shortly after seven, told the driver to wait, and joined Dennis and Richards in the latter’s office.

The doctor looked tired, with eyes deep-drawn in his head, and an unfamiliar sag about his mouth, and he had developed a nervous tic of the neck muscles.

Prescott remarked about it, and was rewarded with a narration of all the doctor's troubles since the murder. The Captain thought them picayune beside his own, and got Johnny Dennis and the notebook into the conversation as soon as possible:

"How did you happen to have this, Dennis?" he asked.

"I found it when I came home this noon. It was lying on the desk, and I don't know how long it's been there."

"What do you mean—you don't know?"

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"I mean I'm not certain whether it was there this morning. Or even when you searched the room yesterday."

"It wasn't," said Prescott.

"Then somebody came in and left it yesterday afternoon or this morning."

"Who could get in?"

"Anybody," said Johnny with a shrug. "The door's always unlocked, and old lady Cleeby leaves the front door open these hot days. Anybody could have walked in."

"But you didn't see anybody?"

"I've been out hunting a job. The room was empty."

"Mrs. Cleeby might have seen someone."

"There's a chance," said Dennis. "Anyone who knocks respectably, she watches, but anyone who is quiet enough can avoid her easy!"

"I'll see her in the morning. I don't suppose," the Captain added casually, "that you had that notebook, Johnny?"

"Me? What would I do with it?" Then he answered the question directly, "No, sir. I didn't have it. I knew it was missing, so I brought it over here as soon as I could."

Disconcertingly, it occurred to the Captain that the notebook might never have been missing at all. Perhaps both he and Johnny had missed it in going over Sylvester's things. The eye can skip the most obvious articles.

When Johnny had gone, Prescott wrapped up the notebook.

"I'll have to take it down to be tested for fingerprints,"

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he said, “but I’ll get it back right away. Is it all here?”

“Only Winkler could tell, and he hasn’t seen it yet. By the way, you’ll find my prints. I handled it unthinkingly when Dennis brought it in.”

Prescott got up to go, but Richards detained him. “Louis, how long will your men have to remain here? They upset our routine, disturb our patients —”

“It shouldn’t be long. But a murderer at large is dangerous. We want to take no chances.”

“You’ve reason to think he may—strike again?”

“No. But he may think someone knows something, though I don’t think anybody does—with one possible exception.”

“Who?”

“What gets me,” said Prescott, “is that almost everybody—perhaps everybody but the murderer himself—seems to have told the truth. No lies. No contradictions. Nothing to get your teeth into. There are five or six possibilities, but little to point to any one of them.”

“What possibilities, Louis?”

Prescott named them.

Richards said, “Has it occurred to you to view your suspects in the light of character and psychology?”

“Yes,” Prescott smiled. “I always do, but it isn’t evidence.”

“Still it might give you an answer. And an answer is easier to prove than five or six possible answers.” Prescott knew the truth of this too well to argue it. “A murderer,” said Richards, “has a flaw which makes him solve his problems by violence.”

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“But it’d take a trained psychologist to find it.”

“Possibly not. Take Dennis. Has he a temper that might lead to murder? Or the calculating intellectuality necessary to a premeditated crime? Nonsense! He doesn’t plan. He hasn’t ambition, seriousness, or emotionality. He’s essentially an average boy with a boy’s strengths and weaknesses, a boy’s ideals and eagerness and carelessness.”

Prescott stirred uncomfortably. He believed this was true, but he could scarcely cross off suspects on the strength of his belief.

Richards said earnestly, “Murderers aren’t always weak. Sometimes people kill to rid the world of something dangerous or disgusting. The James girl is that kind. She’s strong, positive, understanding. She couldn’t



kill from weakness. Only from necessity and high purpose. You see what I'm getting at? The psychology of the individual is so important!"

"In other words, you'd eliminate her, too? Dr. Sylvester could hardly be dangerous."

"I should dismiss her," Richards admitted.

"Can you cut my list down any more?" Prescott inquired.

Richards missed the sarcasm. "I don't know the Loomis man well enough to judge. Nor Miss Rollins. But the other two—no. I shouldn't eliminate either. Both are weak."

"What! Winkler and Miss Lewis? Weak?"

"Essentially. The girl is emotional, a poor nurse. She sympathizes with patients, but they hurt and frighten her because she doesn't understand."

"She understood Sylvester. Why not—"

"Superficially. But she failed to understand either

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him or herself during these last few years. She leaps to conclusions, uses intuition—snap judgment."

"She isn't the only one," said Prescott, but again the doctor seemed to miss the tone.

"As for Winkler," he said, "his mind overweighs his emotions. Cold-blooded. He strikes you as strong, but his motive would be one of weakness—personal gain. Cerebral imbalance leads to weakness as well as emotional."

Prescott said, "It's getting pretty late—"

"I'm boring you," said Richards. "But, before you go—why are you so sure the murderer is one of my staff. Five of your six possibilities are from it."

"I haven't found any outside connections," Prescott evaded.

"I see. And it's likely to have been one of those in Hughes."

It was a statement, but there was a hint of question. Sufficient for Prescott to notice. Sufficient for a warning to jump in his mind. The doctor, he realized suddenly, had asked lots of questions.

Aloud he said, "I couldn't limit it very well," adding: "I know you'll excuse me, Doc. I've got to get on. It's late."

Outside, with the missing notebook under his arm, he found daylight still lingering. The cab in which he had come to the hospital was waiting, and roared into life as he approached.

“Thought they’d decided to keep you, pal,” said the driver. Prescott fished in his pocket, read the meter, and paid the man off. The cabby looked disconcerted. “Oh,” he said. “Sorry! Well, I hope they treat you nice.”

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Prescott said, “It’s a beautiful night for walking.”

“Walking? You’ll work up a sweat in no time. You’re too old to be walking in this weather.”

“Get on!” said Prescott gruffly.

“Okay! I’ll be seein’ ya.”

The cab whirred off, its tires kicking up a shower of gravel. Prescott set off on foot, following the curb of the drive.

Richards! he thought.

He started recalling the questions the doctor had asked: how long the police were going to stay? how close was the mystery to solution? who was the person concealing information? who were the suspects? was the Hughes staff more likely to be suspected than outsiders?

Probing questions.

What did he really know about the man: that he was a well-to-do, successful psychologist and executive, a philanthropist, a man of many friends and good reputation.

Superficial facts, all of them.

The train of thought started, facts marshaled in support. Consider the fingerprints. Richards had accompanied the Captain to every place where his prints had been found. He had been the last to handle the doorknobs and the elevator button. Now Prescott wondered if that had been deliberate.

Then, too, Richards, a stickler for rules, had not made Johnny Dennis return to his office when they met him in the vestibule. And later it had been he who suggested questioning Dennis in a consultation room instead of in the office, though this had left the foyer only under Lynch’s guard. In other words,

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he had twice delayed the discovery of the body. Was that intentional?

It had been he who suggested the surgery when the weapon was mentioned, and blundered down the hall to open both the door and the knife case.

And he had just admitted that his fingerprints would be found on the notebook.

Add to this that he had been at the hospital Tuesday night from 9:20 on, and it was almost too much of a good thing.

At this point, Prescott decided that the cab driver had been right about working up a sweat, and deliberately slowed his pace.

He crossed the bridge over the brook, where the killer might have washed his knife, but hadn't, and started up-grade. The woods opened, and the string of lights marking the Boulevard was comforting. The Captain returned to Richards.

But the first enthusiasm for a new idea had passed.

Questions were, after all, natural. Nor had the doctor gone out of his way to get his fingerprints in the lavatory where the murderer had most certainly been. And what purpose could he have had, if he were the murderer, in delaying the discovery of the body? And there was no motive. In fact, since the murder and the escape must inevitably react upon the hospital, Richards would have killed Sylvester away from the hospital, if he had had to kill him at all.

In short, the suspicion collapsed.

Prescott reached the entrance, feeling rather pleasantly tired in the legs, but hot. Having disposed of his problem, he decided he would ride home if there were a cab available.

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There was a cab. He walked towards it.

The cabby leaned out and said, "Hi, pal! Had enough walking?"

Prescott stopped short, staring at the man with sudden dislike. "You've a hell of a nerve waiting for me!" he snapped.

"I thought a guy as old as you would appreciate—"

Prescott repeated abruptly, "You've a hell of a nerve! I just came over to tell you so. Now, go on! Beat it!"

"You're the boss, brother," said the cabby.

Prescott turned south, ignoring the man's derisive wave.

He hadn't walked a hundred yards before he knew he wasn't acting his age. Both feet were hot and sore, but he favored the right one a little, for there seemed to be a nail coming through the heel. And his legs were beginning to ache. And it was hot.

The Captain stopped at the corner. Another cab—a street car!

On the other side of the Boulevard, his friend was moving at a walking pace.

The Captain decided not to wait for a cab.

## CHAPTER XXI

### How Parisi Escaped

THE Captain walked south along the Boulevard, then turned west to thread the streets of the residential district, and all the time the insolent cabby loitered along a hundred feet behind.

There was no longer any doubt about the nail in his right shoe. His heel felt raw.

When he reached tire University, the sudden memory of Alice Rollins was like an inspiration. She had started her night walks at ten. To be sure, now that Bert Sylvester was dead, she probably stayed home, but it would mean a wait—a rest—of only half an hour to verify that. It was almost 9:30.

He detoured the necessary block and a half and sat down on a low wall surrounding tire Psi Upsilon house, just down the street from the sorority. The cab drew to the curb at the corner.

There was a light on the second floor. Prescott, relaxing with his back against a pillar, watched it. It was good to sit down. It was better to get his shoes off. The faint breeze was refreshing on his face, and he was abruptly, pleasantly drowsy.

The half hour passed like ten minutes. He was just beginning to feel chilly when the light went off. The Captain hastily got into his shoes. A girl came down

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the steps, turned in his direction, and passed him on the other side of the street. It was Alice Rollins.

When she reached the corner, he followed. The taxi made a U-turn, and started once more in leisurely pursuit.

Alice Rollins took the route by which Prescott had just come. In momentary panic, he wondered if she were going to the hospital.

His short rest had stiffened his muscles. He felt old.

The cab drew up beside him.

“Listen, pal,” said the driver, reprovably, “I can’t say much for this conduct in a guy your age, but if you must follow the dame, how about doing it sitting down?”

Prescott was surprised to find he hated the man—hated him so much emotion choked him.

“I mind my own business, see?” said the cabby, “but an old guy like you shouldn’t wander around the streets nights. It hurts me to see it—here.”

“It’ll hurt you somewhere else if you don’t scram!” snapped Prescott. The retort was embarrassingly inane.

“Have a good walk!” said the other. He dropped back to his old position. He seemed difficult to discourage.

The thing became a nightmare. Alice Rollins bore east, and every turn she made convinced Prescott that she was headed for Exeter. He was no longer conscious of his legs from the waist down. There was simply a hot, burning sensation between there and the pavement. When the girl reached the Boulevard and turned north, Prescott paused in weary, incredulous

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disgust, and the cab drew closer in anticipation of the kill.

But Alice Rollins did not go to the hospital. Six blocks farther on, she turned sharply to her right and disappeared through a gap in a big stone wall that paralleled the sidewalk: Glen Avon Cemetery, where Dr. Herbert Sylvester had been buried that afternoon.

This was anti-climax.

There was no point in following further, but at this moment the cab slid to the curb, and the Captain entered the cemetery.

The girl moved without hesitation through the tree-shaded grounds, while Prescott, warned and led by the sound of her feet on the gravel, followed swiftly on the grass. After a long walk, the sounds ceased, and he saw her figure against the starlight, hurrying across the lawn.

Prescott sat down on a tombstone.

He could hear her crying. He waited five minutes, ten minutes. He moved off the tombstone and set his back against it. The sobbing failed to touch him. He was vaguely sorry, but far more concerned about his own aches and pains.

Time dragged. A black spruce stood out against the stars. The cold of the ground worked up, and he shivered. There was a catch deep in his throat, below the base of his tongue, not a soreness or a tickle, but the first infallible sign of a cold. Quite unexpectedly, he coughed.

Alice Rollins gasped.

He said quickly, steadily, "This is Captain Prescott, Miss Rollins. Sorry to startle you."

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"Oh!" He could hear her labored breathing. After a moment she said, "Why are you here?"

"I've been watching the grave," he lied.

"You expected—me?"

"Why not?" he asked. "You were in love with him, weren't you?"

"Oh, yes!"

It was scarcely more than a breath, but it held everything that Alice Rollins had thought and felt and dreamed. It told the Captain that she was ready to talk, if he said the right thing.

He spoke without effort, without doubt. Only afterwards did he have a qualm of uncertainty.

"Tell me about it," he said.

She hesitated. Then she said thinly, plaintively, "What is there to tell? I loved him. There wasn't a thing I could do about it."

After a moment she added, "It isn't often we meet our heroes. Maybe it's just as well.... I knew him so long before I saw him.... I'd heard about him, dreamt about him. I knew what he was doing, and what it meant, and I used to work nights, when the other girls were asleep and the house was quiet, and imagine he was beside me, urging me along, telling me what great things we would do together if I could only catch up with him."

She said, "I couldn't catch up. It was too hard.

"Even when Professor Schlosser told me I could help the doctor with an experiment, I didn't meet him. I kept working and working. I don't think I did anything else all that while, and I cut classes until the dean told me I'd have to pay attention to my other work or I couldn't go on with the experiment.

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"Sometimes I thought I'd never get it done. I used to think of him waiting for me to finish, and it would drive me nearly crazy.

"And then I did meet him.

"Professor Schlosser told me I could take my paper out to Dr. Sylvester myself. I was afraid. I begged him not to make me, but he insisted.

“Bert was in his laboratory, and he smiled at me when I came in. Honestly, he didn’t look like a genius at all. You wouldn’t have known he was one if you didn’t know all he’d done. I felt he was human, but I knew he wasn’t, and that I ought not to be liking him that way.

“When he took my paper, I was trembling all over, and I thought I’d fall through the floor before he finished reading it, but I kept thinking how wonderful it would be to work with him, and then I wondered what it would be like if he kissed me.

“Then he looked up and said, ‘This is very good. I wonder if you’ve time to do some other work for me?’ and I couldn’t say a word. It was as though my heart had jumped up in my throat and was beating there like mad. I just nodded.

“I worked with him four and a half months—four months and twelve days. I went to the laboratory every day, and I’d see him, and he used to work right beside me, and sometimes I dropped things because I trembled so much, and I couldn’t think what I was doing. Just because he was near. I used to touch him sometimes to feel the thrill, but I had to be careful, because once, when I did that, I dropped a book and broke its binding.

“He never noticed me. He used to work right

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there, talk to me, hand me things, but he wouldn’t notice. It used to drive me crazy sometimes. I was like fire inside, and my hands would get so wet I’d have to dry them. But he never noticed.

“I knew I loved him, and I wanted him to love me. I thought perhaps he was shy, and I used to think of shameless ways to tell him how I felt. But then, that night it rained, and he offered me a ride home, and I told him I’d elope with him if he wanted and tried to kiss him, and the taxi driver got so interested watching that we skidded and almost turned over, and I knew he wasn’t shy. He just didn’t care.

“I must have gone out of my mind. I told him I loved him, and pleaded with him to take me somewhere, and when we stopped in front of the sorority, and he told me to get out, I pounded at his face with both fists, and I hated him! I could have killed him, and I wish I had! And when Professor Schlosser told me that someone else was going to finish the experiment, I’d have killed him then if I could have found a gun.

“But not any more. Love and hate are melted in knowing he’s gone. The fire died when I read he’d been killed.”



“Read!” Prescott was startled into incredulous speech. He was afraid the spell was broken, but the girl said quietly:

“You think I killed him, don’t you? Well, I’ve thought of it, watching him in his laboratory or following him about the grounds while he visited patients. Sometimes it was very sad and bitter-sweet when I thought what might have been, and sometimes it was horrible and burning when I was angry,

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and sometimes it was like a beating pulse. And that’s gone now, all melted.”

“Did you follow him the night he was killed?”

“I lied this morning, didn’t I?” said Alice Rollins. “It doesn’t seem to matter any more. What you say can’t hurt him now. If he did a disgraceful thing, he paid for it.”

“What did he do?”

“He turned that madman loose: I saw him. The papers have it all wrong about Parisi killing him, because Bert was still alive when Parisi left the building.”

Prescott said, steadying his voice, “What happened?”

“I was late,” she said. “I took a trolley. When I got to the lab, Dr. Winkler was alone. I knew Bert would be visiting patients. I find him by the lights in their rooms, and when I saw Parisi’s still lit up, I knew where he was. I hid.”

“What time was this, Miss Rollins?”

“I don’t know. The trolley gets out there at eleven. Maybe it took ten minutes to walk to the lab, and another ten to find Bert. It might have been eleven-twenty. But I don’t know.”

“Did anyone go in or out of Hughes while you were hidden?”

“There was no one even in the foyer before I heard the elevator running. It was he. He stood in the elevator door, looking around. Then he made a motion to someone behind him. He stepped towards the vestibule, pausing to look down the corridors as he crossed the foyer.

“And then someone came out of the elevator. I

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thought it was a nightmare; it seemed so impossible, seeing Joseph Parisi, loose in the foyer, shuffling, bewildered. I’d been present once when Bert

tested him. I knew he was dangerous. That was what made it so awful. Bert took him by the arm, and hurried him outside. I tried to scream. I tried to warn him, but I couldn't make a sound. He gave him a little push, shooed him down the steps, and then he turned and went back inside."

"And then?" Prescott urged.

"I ran away," said Alice Rollins.

"Ran away?"

"I had to! I couldn't believe that Bert Sylvester had turned a madman loose. I knew it would destroy everything he had done. I was afraid for him. And I ran away. I don't know where."

Prescott allowed a sigh to escape him. "Did you see anyone on the grounds, either before you reached Hughes, while you were there, or while you were running away?"

"I didn't see anyone but those two."

"Where did Parisi go after he'd been freed?"

"He wandered off. He seemed uncertain, like a lost little boy, moving because he can't stand still."

The picture was disconcerting, but Prescott did not pause over it. He could guess what had happened to Joseph.

"After Sylvester hurried into the building, did you see where he went? Back to the elevator? Down a corridor?"

"I didn't see."

"Was anyone in the foyer with him?"

"I didn't see anyone."

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"All right," said the Captain. "I guess that's that!"

They came out on the Boulevard together, and the persistent cabby was waiting for them.

Prescott looked and sighed. Then he opened the door and assisted Miss Rollins in.

The cabby said, "Well, brother, you seem to have made the grade! Ready to ride now, I guess, and I don't blame you. Wearing work—for a guy your age!"

"You win," said Prescott, without a smile. "Take us back to the University where I sat down earlier."

"Right you are! And say! You won't mind my charging for waiting time, will you? Kind of ruined my chances of getting other fares tonight, pal!"



## CHAPTER XXII

### The Case is Broken

THE morning papers astonished the Captain. It was not so much the categorical demand for his own resignation and the Commissioner's recall, as the excited, hysterical writing. Generalities had been dropped. Mothers were warned to keep children in the house; women cautioned against opening doors to strangers; shopkeepers advised that Parisi would need food and clothing and might go to any lengths to get them. It was personalized. It carried a message of fear.

And it bothered Prescott more than he liked to admit.

He was on the verge of calling Dugan when the Sergeant called him. "The Commissioner's been trying to get you, sir. He's hot as hell. So's this place. You never seen so many people want protection. The desk Sergeant's nuts and so am I."

"Dugan," said Prescott, "you and I and Hallahan may lose our jobs over this. What are we going to do about it? Learn anything about that shirt?"

"No, sir. Stephani hasn't got one that's blue with yellow stripes. Never did have one, according to him! We're still working, but it looks like a washout.... Say, Captain, I wish you'd come down here."

"Why?"

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"Well, there's a crowd collecting. Maybe you can hear 'em shouting. They're hollering, 'Where's Parisi?' and 'Get the cops!' and 'Throw 'em out!' and all things like that. Anyone that sticks his nose outside gets insulted, and Pinckney got a tomato all over his kisser and is very disgusted. Do I disperse 'em?"

"Oh, damn!" said Prescott. "No, we'd better not touch 'em. If anyone got hurt, we'd be in a worse mess than we are now."

"What if they should try to come in?"

"You can keep 'em out! And keep after that shirt. I'm after a lead myself before I come in."

He called the Commissioner.

The Commissioner gave him twenty-four hours to find Parisi ... or else —!

The Captain could understand the pressure being brought to bear on the Commissioner, but the threat failed to worry him as it might. He knew who had murdered Toscarello, and if he could prove it, he could force him to reveal Parisi's prison. But bluff wouldn't go all the way. He had to dig up a motive and some evidence.

He got dressed and listened all through breakfast to the waitress talk about Parisi and how terrified she was and how strangers gave her the creeps. He bolted his toast and almost scalded his throat on the last of the coffee to escape her.

To make things worse, he had caught a cold last night.

His first visit was to Mrs. Cleeby, who recognized him at once.

"Well, land sakes!" she said. "If you haven't got your name in the papers! Will they fire you?"

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"I hope not," returned the Captain, keeping his pleasant tone with difficulty. "I think we'll get our man, particularly if you can give me some help: Wednesday afternoon or yesterday morning someone came and left a package in Mr. Dennis' room. Did you see anyone?"

"Wednesday afternoon or yesterday morning? Well, let me see! There was Mr. Imperowski, the laundry man, and—"

"I meant strangers, Mrs. Cleeby."

"Well, no! I didn't see any strangers. There was that salesman with the vacuum cleaner, but he didn't get inside the door."

"No one at all? ... Did you go out?"

"Yes—Wednesday. But that was a practical joke. Someone called up and said he was a lawyer, Rufus T. Allsucker, in the Tresent Building, and that if I'd call, I'd learn something of great importance. Well, of course, I hurried off, but there wasn't anybody of that name there, so I knew one of the boys was having fun with me again. Thank goodness, it don't happen so often in the summer months."

"Do you remember anything about the voice of the person?"

"Well, it was familiar. That's why I thought of the boys right away, though I couldn't tell which it was. He made it very smooth and pleasant, with just a little accent— Goodness!" she said and stopped. Prescott looked inquiring. The little gray woman's eyes had popped wide. "My goodness!" she repeated. "You don't suppose—"

"What, Mrs. Cleeby?"

“Well, it—it might have been the same voice that

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called up for Dr. Sylvester the evening of the—the murder. You—don’t—”

“Could you be sure?”

“Gracious! I don’t know! The thing never occurred to me until just now. But I think it was. I’m quite sure it was! Gracious!”

“Thanks,” said Prescott. “If this proves as important as I think it is, I’ll remember you in the matter of the reward.”

“Oh, my!” said Mrs. Cleeby, rendered quite speechless.

It took Louis Prescott a little while to realize just how important a piece of information it was. Hashing it over, he began to see.

He had no doubt that Mrs. Cleeby’s practical joker had returned the notebook while the woman was away.

Therefore, the owner of the voice had had the notebook.

And the owner of the voice had left the message “near eleven” for Sylvester Tuesday night.

That connected the notebook and the message.

Prescott’s mind was leaping far ahead, but he forced it to a pedestrian pace to make sure of his points:

Two things in which Sylvester had been concerned had happened near eleven of Tuesday night: he had, according to Alice Rollins, freed Parisi, and he had been murdered.

The missing notebook must have been connected with one of those two events.

Which and how?

Prescott recalled saying to Richards Tuesday night:

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“Why should anyone purposely turn a lunatic loose?” and Richards had replied that motive didn’t matter. But the motive was clear now.

Sylvester had turned Parisi loose because he had been forced to. The notebook—“eight months’ to a year’s work lost,” to quote Schlosser—had been used as a club.

This brought up the question, Why should anyone want Parisi free?

The answer to that had been obvious for a long while: to frame him for the murder of Toscarello.

Prescott was sure of his reasoning. It accounted for Sylvester's two mysterious shadows: they had, of course, been studying him, figuring out the best way to make him free Parisi. They had concluded, rightly, that his work was paramount in his life, and therefore his weakest point, and they had struck at it.

It accounted, too, for the doctor's depression: the loss of his notebook.

And it accounted, finally, for the "cycles of mania and depression" that had puzzled Prescott till now. They meant simply that the thieves had contacted him, and the doctor was alternating between elation at the prospect of getting his notebook back, and depression at the thought of what he must do to get it.

So far, it was clear as crystal.

There remained two fundamental questions whose answers were not quite as definite, though the Captain had his theories.

First, the murderer of Sylvester.

Theory: if Sylvester had learned who the two men following him were, he might have planned, after securing the return of his precious notebook by freeing

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Parisi, to have saved himself by revealing their identity to Richards; and the two, with Toscarello's murder planned, might have killed him to prevent this.

Second: the identity of the two men.

Certainly Stephani was neither, for he had been at the Estis' during the events at the hospital, but Prescott had no doubt who they were: Spiello and Luciano.

Stephani had been the brains, those two his stooges. They had provided his alibi, which presupposed their working together.

Always supposing, the Captain added wryly, that it could be proved Stephani had killed Toscarello.

If Spiello and Luciano could be cracked—!

It was a gamble, but a pretty good one.

He got off the trolley he had taken to Quarry Street, went to a drugstore and called Headquarters.

Dugan was there, which surprised him.

"You can pick up Spiello and Luciano, Sergeant," he said. "I've a hunch we can make 'em talk."

“I beat you to it, sir!” said Dugan, his heavy voice jubilant with relief and pride. “I issued the order fifteen minutes ago, just after we found Stephani’s shirt!”



## CHAPTER XXIII

### Motive for Stephani

“YOU found the shirt!” Prescott repeated.

“That’s broken it, Dugan! Where was it?”

“Well, sir, he slipped up, like they all do! He gave it to the janitor with some rags, telling him to burn ’em. Trying to be casual about it, see? But the janitor looked them over and found the shirt inside. There was a little blood on it, and the fellow figured Stephani’d cut himself shaving and thrown it away. He washed it, and was wearing it himself when I found it.”

“Did he wash the stains off?”

“We can bring ’em back!” said Dugan. “The chemist says so. And I’ve got witnesses who swear it was Stephani’s shirt, and the nigger on Quarry Street has identified it and so have the Estis. That was plenty for me. I sent out a call for Luciano and his friend. I figured we’d break the alibi with them, and then haul in Stephani.”

“Better take him now,” said Prescott. “He may head for the hills! And another thing! Joseph might be at Luciano’s or Spiello’s. They know where he is, anyway.”

“Right!” said Dugan. “I hadn’t thought of that.”

Prescott, feeling the swell of elation, asked, “Any signs of motive, Dugan?”

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“No, sir. And it’s a big hole. The D.A. won’t like it.”

“I’ve a hunch,” said Prescott. “I’m following it up.”

Leaving the booth, he walked a block north on First to the apartment of Miss Rose Ascuilio. She was in, a hard-faced girl with smoky eyes, heavy lips, and an insolent slouch.

She said, “I been expecting you since Wednesday. What’s the matter with you cops, anyway?”

She swept an armful of clothes from a line over the radiator and disappeared with them. She came back, fluffing her dried, wiry hair, and slouched into a seat.

“Bring on your questions,” she said, reaching for a cigarette.

“You knew Mr. Toscarello well?”

“Yeah,” said Rose Ascuilio. “Intimately, as the papers say.”

“What can you tell me about him?”

“I could tell you plenty, mister! Enough to raise the hair on your head, if I felt like it.”

Prescott said, “So?” Then he asked, “What do you mean, exactly?”

“You don’t want to hear about it,” she said. “It ain’t nice, and besides, what’s it got to do with Joseph Parisi?”

“Toscarello wasn’t killed by Joseph,” said Prescott. “I know who did kill him, and I’m looking for motive.”

“Yeah? That shouldn’t be hard to find.”

“Did you know anything about Toscarello’s business?”

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“Not a thing, mister. We had other things to talk about.”

“Did you know any of his friends?”

“He didn’t have any.”

“Enemies, then?”

The girl made a kick with her hanging foot. “I guess there’s plenty glad to see him dead—not to say they killed him!”

“Would you make a guess?”

“No,” said the girl. “After all, how would I like it if somebody put the finger on me when you didn’t know anything about me? Wouldn’t that be a dirty trick!” She hoisted herself to her feet. “I got nothing to say,” she repeated.

“I don’t blame you,” said Prescott. “We know Toscarello was a bad egg. We’ve had him in—for sex crimes among others.”

“We’re talking about the same guy,” said Rose, moving towards the windows with flat, weary movements. “There wasn’t much to Lou besides that. Maybe you guessed he wasn’t normal about it?” She said, “You wouldn’t believe the things that went on here. Well, skip it! ... Maybe some dame wouldn’t put up with all I did.”

“There were other women?”

“Yeah, sure!” There was hot sullenness in her eyes. “No one woman for Lou. I knew his lousy reputation before he started looking my way, so I didn’t mind.” She came across the room, both hands smoothing the black dress across her breasts. “Do you really want to know what Lou was like, mister?”

“I think I know,” said Prescott. “From his record, and from what I’ve seen. But I’m interested in motive.

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In those other women. Could you give me a lead?”

“I still got nothing to say.”

“Will you tell me what you know about a particular person?”

The girl hesitated, then nodded.

“Would the name—Isabella—mean anything to you?”

For an instant the woman looked blank. Then her eyes went hot, and she said, “You cops aren’t so damn dumb! Yes. It means something, and it makes a liar out of me, because I’m not telling you anything about her, after all.”

Prescott got to his feet, and said, “Thanks. I still don’t blame you!”

He returned to the drugstore on the corner of Quarry, secured a telephone book, and looked up the address of a Dr. Ferenetti whom he had heard Richards mention once.

He went to Ferenetti’s office, and was able to see him after a short wait.

Ferenetti was professionally reticent, but the name Prescott had mentioned to Rose Ascuilio evidently meant something to him, too.

“You treated her recently, I believe?” Prescott asked.

Ferenetti considered the question. “Not in three or four months.”

“What did you treat her for then?”

The doctor said, hesitating again, “Double pneumonia.”

“Was that all?”

“Yes,” said Ferenetti, “that was all.”

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The answer, this time, was unhesitating, and Prescott knew it was a deliberate lie.

“Okay,” he said, getting to his feet, “save it for the defense.”

He left, well satisfied.

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## CHAPTER XXIV

### Confession

PRESCOTT came into Headquarters the back way because of the crowd, gave Willie Krutz Sylvester's notebook, and ran the gantlet of reporters to his office. There he rang for Dugan.

The Sergeant was enjoying life again. "Are those newshawks in for a surprise!" he crowed. "When shall we tell 'em?"

"We'll get our confessions first, Sergeant."

"Easy! Who do we start on?"

"Who have we got?"

"Luciano, Spiello, Stephani and Big Tony himself. He showed up half an hour after we pulled Stephani in, blowing about habeas corpus and what not."

"Did we get Joseph?"

"No, sir. No luck there. Hallahan didn't find him at Spiello's or Luciano's, and neither of 'em 'll say where he is. I didn't think it was worth while to blast it out of 'em."

"Let them cool their heels. I want a word with Willie before I tackle them. We'll need all the evidence we can get."

It was half an hour before Willie phoned him.

"Richards' and Dennis' prints were on the cover of the notebook," he reported. "Otherwise it was clean.

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Somebody must have wiped it. Somebody'd wiped the pages, too."

"That would mean someone had looked through the book and was afraid he'd left prints."

"Sure. But there're about 200 pages, and he must have got tired wiping, and begun to give 'em a lick and a promise—which won't take off fingerprints. Sylvester's began showing up, and Winkler's. Along toward the middle there's a thumb print that's a stranger. Interested?"

"Hell, yes," said Prescott. "I'll give you a ring when I'm ready. Come to my office and bring your stuff." He swung from the phone. "Sergeant, bring Spiello and his friend in here!"

Rarely had Prescott seen two boys more frightened. Their shifty eyes ran from one person to another, sought the windows and doors, and fled finally to the corners as though dreading what they might find there. Spiello was a

narrow-shouldered, skinny lad with a prominent Adam's apple. Luciano was taller, but slight, and twisted a soiled cap nervously in his hands.

Prescott said, "Sit down!" but it required the Sergeant's big hands on their backs to make them move. Spiello gripped the arms of his chair as though he needed to hold to something solid.

Prescott added, "Is Hallahan in yet, Dugan? Better fetch him."

"Yes, sir," said Dugan, flatly. "We might need him!"

Prescott shuffled papers on his desk while the silence grew. Luciano shivered, though the draft from the window was like a furnace.

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Suddenly Spiello said, "What's the idea?"

His voice cracked, and came out soprano, sounding childish to his own ears. He flushed under his dark skin.

Prescott did not answer. The silence dragged.

Dugan came back with Hallahan, and they stood behind the boys, making the most of their height and strength. The two watched with ill-concealed restlessness.

"What are these kids booked for?" asked Prescott casually.

"That tobaconist's robbery last spring—"

"You guys is nuts!" exclaimed Spiello, leaping to his feet. "I wasn't anywhere around. I—"

"You needn't worry about the robbery, Mr. Spiello," Prescott said. He waited until the boy sat, before adding, "We're interested in something more important."

"More important?"

"Kidnaping.... Murder."

There was a minute of silence. Luciano managed to say, "Murder?"

"You can't prove murder on us!" screamed Spiello. "There hasn't been a murder! It's a fake! Listen, Al," he said, turning abruptly to Luciano, "don't say a word, see! No matter what they do. They think they can frame us! But we know a lawyer, and we'll get to him. Don't say a word, Al!"

"I won't say nothing," said Luciano.

"Speaking of being framed," said Prescott quietly, "what do you think Stephani Parisi's been doing to you?"

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Spiello insisted, "Don't say a word, Al! We got a right to a lawyer. He can't make us talk!"

“You’re right,” admitted Prescott. “But we don’t need to. We can prove you killed Luigi Toscarello.”

“You’re nuts!” screamed Spiello.

“Joseph Parisi killed that guy! I read in the papers,” snapped Luciano.

“What was he doing in your car Tuesday night if you weren’t in on it?” asked Prescott, taking a flyer.

Spiello pounced on it. “You see, Al? The guy’s nuts! We ain’t got a car, mister, and never did have one.”

“Sure!” said Prescott calmly, “but you rented one.” There was a surprised silence, and the Captain knew he had hit the mark this time. He said, “That was careless—with murder in view!”

“Listen, mister, we didn’t have—” Spiello stopped sharply. Then he finished lamely, “We don’t know a thing about murder.” It was almost a slip of the tongue.

Prescott said, “What do you know about Dr. Herbert Sylvester?”

“Never heard of him.”

“No?” The Captain’s voice was level. “Read about Parisi’s escape in the papers, didn’t you?”

Spiello said, “I didn’t read about anybody but Toscarello.”

“Why? Interested in that, particularly?”

Luciano said suddenly, “You might do a little shutting up yourself, Dan. You’re going to get tripped up.”

“Interested in the Toscarello murder?” repeated

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Prescott, concentrating on Spiello. “Wanted to know all about it?”

“I knew him, see? ... You’d better let us out of here,” Spiello added with no great assurance. “We got a right to a lawyer.”

“We can’t let you out,” said Prescott. “You’re here for life.”

“What!” barked Luciano. “You got nothing on us!”

“No? ... You took Joseph Parisi in a rented car to a hide-away and held him; that’s kidnaping. Then, if, as you claim, Joseph killed Luigi Toscarello, you’re accessories before the fact for transporting him to the vicinity of the crime. Further, you stole a notebook of Dr. Sylvester’s, which is petty larceny. You used it to force the doctor to free Joseph, and that’s extortion. If Joseph killed Dr. Sylvester, you’re accessories after the fact for taking him away from the scene. And since you’ve given him shelter ever since, you’ve been harboring a criminal.”

Spiello was staring with slack mouth, but Luciano said desperately, "You can't prove it!"

"No? Ever heard of a Mrs. Cleeby?" Luciano shot a quick glance at the Captain. "She had a call from a mythical Rufus Allsucker. His voice was one she had heard before—on Tuesday night."

Both boys were shaken. Neither could answer.

Prescott reached for the telephone. "We'll make a test—"

"Wait a minute!" Luciano found his voice. "I ain't talking with nobody without my lawyer. You can't pull a thing like this!"

"You'll need a lawyer," said Prescott. "You see,

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Mrs. Cleeby wasn't fooled. She thought she was talking to the doctor's murderer, so she went home by the back way, and saw the man who returned the notebook—you, Mr. Luciano, to judge from her description."

"We gotta talk with a lawyer," said Spiello feebly.

"Also, there's a fingerprint in the notebook. I'm going to find out if it's yours." He sent for Willie Krutz.

Spiello started to say something, but thought better of it. Luciano gazed at the floor. There was a long silence, ended by the appearance of the fingerprint expert with the black notebook, an ink pad, white cards, and a reading glass. He spread them out with deliberation.

Spiello said, "You ain't going to take our prints!"

"That's what you think!" said Dugan. "You been booked, so we can, and there ain't no lawyer can stop it!"

"Wait a minute!" said Spiello. "You can't—" He said, "I won't—" And then Dugan picked him up bodily. Spiello struggled, but the thumb went neatly onto pad and card.

"Now, Mr. Luciano," said Prescott. "If you'll—"

"If you find my prints there, it's a fake!" Luciano protested, but inked his thumb and made the impression with trembling hand.

"Yeah," said Spiello, "it's a fake!"

Willie took the cards to the window, opened the notebook to a marked page, and made his comparison. The boys fidgeted.

Willie said, "It's Mr. Spiello's print."

Spiello jumped to his feet and jabbered.

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"You can change the booking," said Prescott. "Accessory to murder."

Spiello bawled, “Wait a minute! Wait, mister! I didn’t help kill anybody. Honest! Joseph didn’t kill the man. He couldn’t have!”

“Ready to talk?”

“Yeah, sure! I’ll talk. We didn’t kidnap Joseph, see? It was a favor to his folks. And we weren’t accessories, either, because Joseph couldn’t have killed either of those men, mister, no matter what the papers say. We had Joseph locked in! There’s no reason why we should be stuck with it, is there, Al?”

Luciano said, sullenly, “You’ve admitted everything they want. Go ahead and tell ’em about it!”

“What do you want me to say?” asked Spiello in a small voice.

“Tell what happened—particularly about Stephani.”

The boys were too excited to tell a consecutive story, and some details had to be elicited by exhaustive questioning, with the result that the joint voluntary statement finally set before them for signature was only a summary of what they had said. It read:

“About the middle of June, this year, we were approached by Stephani Parisi with the statement that his brother Joseph, who we knew was at Exeter Hospital, was being detained there against the wishes of himself and his family. We knew this was true, having visited Joseph several times, observed that he was in no way abnormal, and having heard him express the desire to leave the hospital.

“Stephani further told us that his family had tried every legal means to get him out, but that

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the hospital officials were experimenting on him, torturing him, and intending to kill him. Stephani wanted us to help him rescue his brother, and we agreed.

“Stephani further said that it must look as though Joseph had escaped, so we must force someone to set him free.

“To find a way to do this, we began following both David Wiese and Dr. Sylvester. We eventually concentrated on the latter. At first we considered holding his fiancée, but Stephani was afraid this might bring the police into it. Then we noticed how important a certain notebook seemed to be to him, and this we stole on July 10.

“We waited until the fourteenth before we telephoned him. During that time we observed he was seriously worried, and we became convinced he would do whatever we wished.



“When we talked with him, he at first protested and then agreed. We told him to make his plans, and we would call him later. This we did on Sunday, the sixteenth, and he told us he was ready whenever we were. Again we said we would let him know.

“On learning this, Stephani told us to rent a room at the Royal Danielli, and a closed car from Silone & Company, both of which we did. We rented them in Stephani’s name, not liking to use our own.

“On Stephani’s instructions, we then called Dr. Sylvester to fix the hour, leaving a message because he was not home.

“We hereby repudiate statements made by us as to our movements on the night of July 18, such statements having been made on instructions of Stephani, and being in large part false.

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“The following is true: we went to a movie, but left the theater at 10:15. We drove to the hospital in our rented car, parking off the main drive. We hid at one side of the entrance of Hughes Hall, and remained there about three quarters of an hour. During that time certain people left and entered the building, but we could not see anything that occurred inside, because of the angle of our hiding place with the doorway.

“We saw John Dennis, Sylvester’s roommate, leave the building about 10:45. About five minutes after the clocks struck eleven, another man, apparently a doctor, approached and entered. He came out in about ten minutes. Almost immediately thereafter a woman approached and hid in the bushes opposite the entrance, and two or three minutes later, Dr. Sylvester emerged, and pushed Joseph out of the building. He then hurried back inside.

“We did not see Dr. Sylvester again, alive or dead, nor do we know what he did. We could not see inside Hughes, nor did we enter.

“As soon as Sylvester went inside, the woman who was hidden ran off. We then approached Parisi, led him to our car, and transported him to the Royal Danielli. Joseph could not have killed Dr. Sylvester, for he did not return to Hughes.

“Nor did we observe anyone on the grounds or in the building but those here mentioned, nor have we any knowledge of how or at whose hands Dr. Sylvester died.

“We then went to the Club Romano, arriving there by twelve and remaining until shortly after one, when we went to Spinucci’s. We played in his back room until 1:40 when Stephani joined us.

“We informed Stephani of what had happened,

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and of where Joseph was. We all played until two. Then Stephani asked for the key to the apartment where we had left Joseph, and crept past Spinucci who was sleeping behind his bar. This we had done before and was simple if a person is careful. Stephani was wearing a blue shirt with cream-colored stripes that we have since seen at Police Headquarters and identified.

“We continued to play, according to instructions of Stephani, until he returned at 2:40. He was still wearing the same shirt. He was very pale. He gave us the key and instructed us to feed and care for Joseph. He told us what to say if we were questioned, adding that he did not want to be connected with the escape, and asking, therefore, that we say he was in our company throughout the time we had been at Spinucci’s. Spinucci, he said, would do this too, if we woke him and called his attention to the time as we left.

“We have since taken care of Joseph, and he was this morning still at the apartment. We read how he was accused of double murder, but were afraid to come forward.

“We further swear that in everything we did Tuesday night, July 18, we were acting on the suggestion and instruction of Stephani Parisi, unconscious that we were breaking the law.

“Finally, being afraid the notebook in our possession might betray us, we returned it to Dr. Sylvester’s room on the afternoon of July 19, Mr. Dennis being out, and the owner of the house tricked away.”

Prescott watched the two silent boys sign with mixed emotions. Above his satisfaction at having guessed right, was a keen disappointment that the

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story had stopped short of clearing up the Sylvester mystery. The theory that Sylvester had been killed by the kidnapers of Joseph because he had learned their identity was severely shaken. Prescott was sure both Spiello and Luciano had come clean. And Stephani had an alibi.

The necessity of thinking it out prompted him to say, “I’ll see Stephani later, Dugan. I need a bit of lunch first.”

“Shall we break the story to the papers?” Dugan was eager.

“Not till Hallahan gets back with Joseph, Sergeant.”

Which was just as well, for Hallahan found the room at the Royal Danielli unlocked, and Joseph Parisi gone.

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## CHAPTER XXV

### Stephani Capitulates

PRESCOTT returned from lunch at 1:30, sufficiently fortified to take the news in stolid unconcern. "He's out in the open now," he said. "Or dead. We'll have him soon."

Hallahan had brought back with him the janitor of the Royal Danielli, a roly-poly little man with dreamy eyes and a shy, timid grin, whose name, according to the Sergeant, was Mike Angelo, "believe it or not!"

Mike grinned tentatively at the Captain and said, "Very pleased I meet you, signori What you wanta know?"

"My men just visited an apartment in your building. You know the one I mean? Who rented it?"

"Stephani Parisi—so he say."

"Would you know him if you saw him?"

"I see him, signor. Now, downstairs, in thees building."

"Spiello," said Dugan. "It's a formal identification."

"Good. Now, Mike, this man, calling himself Stephani Parisi, didn't live in that apartment, did he?"

"It's right! It's right, signor! It's another man."

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Thees Parisi visit him two, three times. Bring food, perhaps."

"When?"

The little man counted on his pudgy fingers. "Comes Wednesday morning. Comes Wednesday night. Comes twice yesterday. Four times," said Mike Angelo apologetically. "I'm sorry. Comes four times."

"And the man that actually lived in the room—when did he come?"

"Tuesday night, late—midnight."

"You saw him?"

"I heard him, signor. We have a room below the stairs, my Lucia and I. We hear who comes or goes all night."

"How did you know—just by the sound—it was your new tenant?"

"They go to the new room. Three pairs of feet, they climb the stairs, go into the apartment I have rented to Mr. Parisi."

"Did you see the man who occupied the room, later?"

“I saw him—Wednesday, early. From the basement, I hear he has visitors, so I go up, and I find it is not the one I rent to. Thees Stephani Parisi, he is there, too, with a friend, and they have brought my tenant things to eat. They rush me out quick, and say I should not bother their friend, as he gets mad easy.”

“Did you see him again?”

“Thees morning, yes, signor.”

“This morning?”

“I hear someone come in fast, and it is strange footsteps, so I come quick upstairs, in time I see my tenant coming down from his room ahead of someone

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I do not know. They run across the hall and out of the door. That was all.”

“Would you recognize that second man if you saw him?”

“Oh, yes! Yes, please! He’s beeg. Got funny head—beeg jaw, slanting face—” Mike’s gestures bettered his words.

“Big Tony!” said Dugan.

“Get an identification on that, too. It’s a break!”

“They always make mistakes when they move in a hurry,” said the Sergeant ponderously.

“Tell me, Mike,” Prescott went on, “did your tenant have any other visitors besides the man calling himself Stephani Parisi and his friend, and this fellow that went out with him this morning?”

“Yes! One more. Same night he come—late.”

“Tuesday night?”

“Very late. After two. I heard the steps going to thees apartment, and they were light, like a woman’s, and I thought, ‘Aha!’ and wondered should I stop such things, but before I decide, the steps come back and down the stairs. So I get up and peek out, and I see it is no woman, but a man.”

“Would you recognize him again?”

Mike Angelo shook his head slowly. “I not see his face.”

This should have been Stephani, Prescott thought, come for the button from Joseph’s coat. There should be some way to prove it.

“Mike,” he said, “do you remember how he was dressed?”

Mike Angelo looked blank. “I cannot remember

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much,” he averred, “but I tell you thees, he had a very beautiful shirt.”

Prescott nodded in satisfaction. When you knew what to look for, the evidence wasn’t so hard to find. He motioned to Dugan who left the room. “What was it like, Mike?”

Mike looked envious at the recollection. “It was colored silk, maybe, very blue, with yellow-white stripes between. Nice!”

Dugan came back, carrying a shirt. Mike Angelo took a single look at it and became excited. “That is it! That is thees shirt I saw. Very beautiful, eh?”

Prescott agreed with a smile. “Have him make the identifications, Dugan, and keep in touch with him until we’ve got Joseph. He’ll have to identify him, too.”

Still Prescott delayed the interview with Stephani. Mike Angelo’s affidavit was typed and ready, but it was not until the call came from Willie Krutz that the Captain felt that he was prepared.

Willie had been sent immediately to the Royal Danielli. His report was worth waiting for. A blue serge coat with a button torn from the sleeve had left little doubt that Joseph had actually been there, but the fingerprints settled it definitely.

Spiello’s prints had been found on a ten-cent comb, Luciano’s on the doorjamb and elsewhere, and Big Tony Parisi’s were on the doorknob and the bedstead. The police had no record of Stephani’s to compare with some of the other prints found, but that was just a question of time. He had enough, anyway.

It was three when the Captain said, “Bring ’em in,

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Dugan. Let’s finish it up! ... This isn’t going to be such an easy nut to crack.”

“I could crack it,” said the Sergeant grimly, “in the basement.”

“It shouldn’t be necessary. Besides, there’ll be no squawks if we do it here. Even if he doesn’t break, we’ve enough.”

Confessions were of doubtful court value anyway, but he liked to get them. They helped in the collection of evidence. The Royal Danielli, for instance, had been the direct result of what Spiello had said. Stephani might provide a lead as important.

It was a solemn-faced Stephani that was led in. There were lines about his eyes and mouth that had not been there the night of the murders. He

looked sullen, but Prescott soon decided he was scared.

Nor was Big Tony the jovial, grinning man he had been. He was frightened too, but, now that the grin was gone, his face was that of a fighter. He waddled to the desk, brought his fist down on it, and said exactly what Prescott had expected him to say.

“I cannot understand what is the reason of this! Why has my son been arrested and brought to the police place?”

Prescott said, “I’m placing you both under formal arrest, and warning you that anything you say may be used in evidence.... Won’t you sit down, Mr. Parisi?”

Stephani quavered, “What are you arresting us for?”

“You, Stephani, for the murder of Luigi Toscarello—”

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Stephani’s protest was too quick: “But I didn’t do it! What possible reason—? Surely this is a joke!”

“It’s no joke,” said Prescott. “As for the reason, we’ll come back to that. I’m arresting your father as an accessory both before and after the crime.”

Big Tony cleared his throat hoarsely. “It is nonsense! ”We were all in other places. We have alibis!”

The Captain rarely tried to obtain a confession unless he was sure of his ground, for a failure not only shocked his pride, but hurt his reputation among those who should fear him. In the case of Stephani, he was sure.

Stephani was a more difficult problem than Spiello and Luciano had been, but the Captain went at it with a plan of action based on his conception of the young man’s character. He must wear him down, physically and emotionally, to the breaking point, a question of time and timing, of keeping back the bulk of the evidence until Stephani thought there was no more, and then crushing that hope.

He had the emotional tension from five hours of waiting to start with. He built on that by reading carefully selected portions of the Spiello-Luciano statement.

He gave Stephani chance to protest and deny, for nothing wears on a person like resistance. If the boy could have stayed silent, he might have stood a chance, but his repetitious interruptions of “It’s a lie!” “I didn’t do it!” “You can’t prove that!” “I’ve an alibi!” and his vituperations of the two who had confessed were exactly what Prescott wanted.

He took his time, went back and forth over the same ground, reading from the statement, adding descriptive,

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accusative comments of his own, and listening with provokingly apparent disbelief to the denials that followed. He was in no hurry.

When the strain began to tell, he struck his second blow, revealing his knowledge of the room at the Royal Danielli.

Stephani denied that he knew it, but he was beginning to act like a trapped animal, and time and again Prescott caught him in slips of the tongue, contradictions, and inconsistencies.

It went on from 3:15 to 3:30 to 3:45. Big Tony tried to intervene and was harshly silenced. First Dugan and then Prescott and then Dugan marched back and forth over the ground. At four o'clock, Stephani was crying, sobbing his denials in a storm of tears.

Then the Captain began reading bits from Mike Angelo's affidavit, and the effect was demoralizing. Big Tony, who had been a vociferous combatant, retired in confused silence as he saw how badly he was himself involved. Stephani's tear-streaked face was ashen, and he sat doubled over as though sick to his stomach. Their denials began to center on the lack of motive and the alibis.

Prescott was holding the motive as the trump card, but he proceeded to blast Stephani's alibi with the Spiello-Luciano confession. By four-thirty Stephani's face was dead white, his eyes staring, his protests labored. The time had come, Prescott decided, for the coup de grâce.

From the drawer of his desk he took the famous cream and blue shirt that Mike Angelo had identified.

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He thought Stephani was going to faint.

Big Tony did not seem to understand.

"What is it?" he protested. "A shirt—nothing more. What do you expect? That we should recognize it? That—"

"Stephani does," said the Captain grimly. "Stephani wore it at the Estis' Tuesday night, but that wasn't the only place it was seen!"

Stephani was ghastly.

Prescott said, "Stephani gave it to his janitor Wednesday morning and told him to burn it, but the janitor didn't."

“It’s a lie!” said Stephani, but the words stuck.

“Because there was blood on the shirt!”

“It’s a lie!”

“Luigi Toscarello’s blood!”

“Lies!”

“Why pretend? That shirt was seen! Spiello saw it. Luciano saw it. Spinucci saw it. Mike Angelo saw it.”

Stephani was silent, his face drawn.

“And there was a negro on the corner of Quarry and First that saw it!”

Stephani’s eyes closed.

“And he saw the man wearing it walk down Quarry Street and hammer Luigi Toscarello’s brains out on the pavement!”

Abruptly, Stephani was sick.

Prescott motioned Dugan to let him alone.

“How about it?” he barked.

Stephani said, “I killed him! What of it?”



## CHAPTER XXVI

### The Reason

PRESCOTT said, "Better let us have a statement, Stephani."

Big Tony interrupted, "We not talk! We want a lawyer."

"Look, Tony," said Prescott, sucking at his lip, "I know a lot more about this than you think. It won't hurt Stephani to make a statement. If he does, we'll do what we can for him."

"What can you do?" Parisi asked angrily.

"The nub of the matter, Tony, is motive," and Prescott let them think it over. Then he said, "The first time we met—Tuesday night—you made a careless statement, Tony."

"What was that?"

"I asked if you liked Toscarello. You said, 'What can one do? One cannot like everybody, and when a man plays you dirty tricks—' Now, those dirty tricks ... I haven't yet found out what they were."

Tony's pig eyes were restless.

"I know why Luigi Toscarello was killed," Prescott added, "but suppose I dig up one of those dirty tricks and turn it over to the D.A. as motive. What price a jury's sympathy then?"

"But—"

"I want a detailed statement," snapped Prescott.

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"If I get it, you'll go to trial on the motive you give. Mind, I'm not promising acquittal, but I'm handing your lawyer a whale of a talking point."

There was a moment's silence. Then Big Tony Parisi nodded. "We tell you. Eh, Stephani?"

"What difference does it make?" said Stephani.

"Start with motive, and go on from there."

Prescott was sure he knew why Luigi Toscarello had died, but motives were tricky. He wanted to put no ideas into the Parisis' heads before he heard what they had to say. But there had been no need to hesitate. His reading of Toscarello had been right.

Stephani said, "He'd raped my sister."

"There are processes of law," said Prescott.

"Law? ... You think so?" Stephani drew a shuddering breath. "If you had seen her! ... If you had seen her! ... The bruises ... the red welts on her skin ... He had burned her with cigarette ends." He closed his eyes. "If you had seen her," he mumbled, "blue with cold, stumbling—"

Prescott repeated quickly, "Blue with cold? When was this?"

"January."

"January! Seven months—"

"Yes, seven months!" Stephani snapped. "Seven months of hell, but worth it! Worth every hour of it!"

He stopped, his face twisting.

"Why the delay?"

"We had no choice. She came home in that winter storm, freezing, soaked—I found her on the stairs, out of her mind, and by morning she was in a fever with pneumonia. Ferenetti could tell us all that had been

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done to her, but she alone could say who had done it, and we prayed on our knees she might live long enough to tell us."

The emotion was draining out of him, leaving him bone-tired and white. His eyes were tortured. "What more do you want?"

"All the rest," said Prescott. "She lived, of course?"

"Yes." The word was apathetic, but feeling flared again as he repeated, "Yes, she lived; and she told us—what she remembered.... And I wish to God we'd killed him in the street that day as we wanted. It would have been better!"

"Why didn't you?"

"Cowards," he said dully. "We were damned cowards. Afraid. What good, we asked ourselves, was vendetta if the law seized on us in return? We waited. We planned. It took us—a long time.... I'm going to be sick again. Let me finish later."

"No. We'll finish now. What was your plan?"

"Freeing Joseph. He was crazy—who would be surprised at his killing someone? And we knew the law could not touch him: it could only send him back to the asylum. We thought it was a good plan. We arranged his escape."

Prescott got it all slowly: how Spiello and Luciano had been enlisted; how the alibis had been planned; how, Tuesday night at Spinucci's,

Stephani had received the key to Joseph's room from his friends; how he had slipped out, visited the Royal Danielli to get a button from Joseph's coat, and how, on the way to the murder, he had stopped where they were erecting a building to take a brick.

From there on, Stephani told it fluently, almost

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eagerly, reveling in the ghastly details. He had seen Toscarello leave his restaurant, and he had known just how fast he had to walk to meet his victim in Quarry Street, down which the man walked every night. They had met at the alley, and Toscarello had seen death staring him in the face.

That moment had been fine enough to last Stephani for the rest of his life.

The aftermath—the flight toward Second, across it, and down the street on the other side, the disposal of the blood-stained brick in an alley garbage can, the return to Spinucci's, the return home, the discovery of blood on his shirt, and its disposal—all that was dully told, dragged out by repeated questions.

Stephani was spent.

When the Parisis, father and son, had been taken away, the Captain sat fumbling with a paper-cutter, tired, but elated.

He said to Dugan, "Joseph's still loose, but I think I'll break the story to the papers anyway. It'll draw their sting."

"Swell," said Dugan. "I been looking forward to it! You got a visitor, though. She's been waiting an hour, and maybe you want to see her first."

"Visitor?" said Prescott. "Who?"

"It's that James girl," said Dugan.

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## CHAPTER XXVII

### The Warning

LESLIE JAMES said, "I hope you don't mind my calling. Am I wasting your time?" She looked disconcertingly lovely in that dingy office, but Prescott, puzzled by the visit, was wary.

"Not at all," he said.

"I picked up the afternoon papers, and noticed you've made some arrests in the Parisi case. Solved it?"

"Yes." When she remained silent, he added, "It'll be in the morning papers."

"You've given the story out?" Sharply.

Surprised, Prescott said, "I was just going to."

The tension passed. She said, "If all the world's to know, can you tell me now?"

Conscious of suspicion, and hating it, Prescott wondered what she was getting at. He told her what there was to tell.

She said, "I knew something like that had happened. Do you realize what this story may do if it's published?"

"Do?" said Prescott. "It'll get me out of a tough spot."

"It'll cause another death! Bert's murderer will kill again."

Prescott gaped. Then he leaned back in his chair,

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his mind racing. But Bert Sylvester's murderer striking again on learning of Stephani's story fitted with no conception of the case that he had had.

"You sound," he said, "as though you knew the murderer."

"I do," said Leslie James. "At least, I'm morally certain."

"Who is it?"

Leslie James shook her head, and she was very grave. "I'm not saying, Captain Prescott, because I might be wrong. I wouldn't want to put unjustified ideas into your head."

Unconsciously Prescott played with the paper-cutter, while he tried to keep pace with events that seemed suddenly to be spinning along far ahead of him.

“I could hold you as a material witness, Miss James,” he said. “You’d better tell me what you know.”

“Holding me won’t prevent another death,” she said crisply. “Besides, you couldn’t. I’ve seen or heard nothing that you haven’t—probably not as much. All I’ve done is form an opinion.”

“You’re hardly justified in keeping it to yourself if there’s another murder in prospect.”

“I’ve given that considerable thought last night and today. A person shouldn’t play God, Captain Prescott. But if I was silent, it seemed I condemned someone to death; and if I informed, I also condemned someone to death. I can’t do either. I have to compromise, and trying to get this story suppressed is the compromise.”

“Who will the next victim be?” asked Prescott.

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“I can’t even tell you that. Protection would do no good if I’m right, and any statement I might make would mislead you.” She smiled ruefully. “I’m sorry. I’m quite wrong from your point of view. But believe me! If I were positive—if I had proof—I’d tell you. Won’t you keep that story out of the papers?”

“I can’t, on the basis of what you’ve told me, Miss James.”

Prescott was not yet sure if he had the reason for Leslie James’ visit. He felt that the girl’s story covered something pretty subtle.

“It would come out at Parisi’s trial, anyway,” he added.

“The situation may alter by then. You won’t?”

“No.”

“I’ll make you a sporting proposition, then. You’ve all of five hours to make the morning papers. I’m going to ask you to sit down and think the case over in the light of what you’ve told me about Stephani.”

“What do you expect of that?”

“I don’t know. I’m passing the buck to a Higher Court, I suppose. You might solve the case.”

“I might solve it?”

“Why not? I knew probably less than you, and I did. It’s logical.”

“You’re playing God after all.”

“Not at all. It’s police business to do that, nasty business that I won’t do for them. If you solve the murder, I’ll believe it was intended to happen that

way; if the papers go to bed with the story, I'll believe that was intended, too. At all events, I've done what I can. Good night!"

"Wait a minute!" protested the Captain. "You're

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being very neatly fatalistic about this, but it puts me up the creek without a paddle."

"Just where I've been for twenty-four hours," said Leslie James with a mocking smile. "Sorry I have to rush!"

Prescott returned to his desk bewildered.

Dugan stuck his head in the door. "Ready for the reporters?"

"No!" said Prescott explosively. "I'm holding up the story for a while. Tell 'em I'll give 'em an interview later—nine o'clock, ten—somewhere in there."

Dugan, looking puzzled, retired.

Louis Prescott was embarrassingly aware that he was playing directly into Leslie James' hands. It was embarrassing because he couldn't figure what her game was.

God-damned women! he thought. She wants this story suppressed, but not for the reason she gave. I'd bet on it!

Nevertheless, he settled down to consider the Sylvester murder in the light of Stephani's story, as he had tacitly promised to do. Half an hour later, he was ready to chuck it.

These were the gist of his reflections:

That Stephani and his companions were unknown to everyone at the hospital, including Sylvester, and that, therefore, no connection was possible.

That there was nothing in Stephani's story to give new motive for murder to Winkler—he had gained his end already. Nor to Johnny—for he had gained his. Nor to any of the others because none of them had had a reasonable motive even for Sylvester's murder. At least, he hadn't been able to find any.

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If he was to believe Leslie James, she had guessed the murderer hours before she knew of Stephani's arrest, and she had spoken of logic in connection with it. Well, he had tried to work things out logically, but the

arguments had carried him only so far. Was there a flaw in them? Or had she carried one of them further?

The fingerprints and the disposal of the knife still pointed to someone in Hughes. There was a flaw in that, all right, but he had seen it from the first, and certainly it could be carried no further.

The stab wounds and the lack of a struggle still pointed to an opportunist murderer framing Parisi. What other explanation of them could there be?

The Stephani story had no bearing on any of that.

Was there some new angle he hadn't seen? Had Spiello and Luciano lied—killed the doctor themselves? If so, why hadn't they promptly blamed it on Joseph instead of absolving him? And anyway, where did that lead?

It was possible, too, that Alice Rollins had returned after her flight, but that left the fingerprints and the disposal of the knife unaccounted for. She would have known about knives in the surgery of course, and could have obtained one—

Something was hammering at Prescott's brain, and a queer feeling of excitement began to mount within him.

The knife had been in the surgery. If Alice Rollins had wanted to get it — The door was unlocked, of course. Kay Lewis had left it so when she had gone for bandages, though she had closed it behind her.

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She had closed it! That meant that Alice Rollins would have had to—

Prescott sat enjoying the thrill. It wasn't fool-proof logic, for an accident might have happened, but it pointed a flaw in a conclusion that a moment before had seemed sound.

He had been cockeyed from the start! There was no opportunist murderer! No framing of—

"Parisi!" yelled Dugan, sticking his head in the door. "We know where he is! Do you want to be there when we take him?"

"Hell, yes!" said Prescott. "Because, when he's captured, we can write 'Finis!' to the case!"

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## CHAPTER XXVIII

### Man-Hunt!

THREE squad cars slid out of the alley behind Police Headquarters, each with six policemen armed with rifles and tommy guns. Prescott, who had borrowed a gun himself and was riding with Dugan and Hallahan in the first car, was amused at the array necessary to take a single defenseless man, but the weapons were for the protection, rather than the capture, of the prisoner.

Dugan's report on the telephone call which had preceded this chase gave no reason to suppose that Joseph would be difficult to capture. He had walked into a farmer's house on the outskirts of the city while the family was at supper, demanding something to eat. They had recognized him from his description and had fled, one of the boys racing down the road to a neighbor's telephone. Prescott, picturing their consternation, smiled.

It took half an hour to thread the city, but a burst of speed when they reached the paved highway brought them quickly to the dirt road down which they had instructions to turn. There was no mistaking the house. A group of ten or a dozen awe-struck people stood behind a barbed wire fence, staring across a hundred feet or so of pasture-lawn toward a rectangular, slovenly, dirty-white farmhouse that

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stood beneath two great elms. There was nothing to see at all.

The attention of the group shifted to the weapons of the uniformed figures pouring from the automobiles.

Prescott said, "Who's head of the house?"

A tall boy of nineteen or twenty shuffled forward and said, "Me, I guess. Paw's gone to the capital about some cows."

"You the one that called us?"

"Naw!" said the young man. He chewed a minute at a piece of grass, and then decided to add, "That was my brother Caleb."

"Is our man still in the house?"

"I ain't seen him come out," said the boy.

A driveway that was no more than a couple of muddy ruts led across the front yard where two cows grazed peacefully. Behind the house, on rising



ground, there were four farm buildings: a series of stalls, a red barn, a smaller stone building whose character was not apparent, and a root cellar, set into the slope of the hill with an entrance not far from the back door of the farmhouse.

Prescott called Dugan and Hallahan, instructed the rest to stay where they were, and started toward the house along the rutted drive. If he and the Sergeants couldn't handle Joseph Parisi alone, there was something wrong.

Sharply, in the stillness of the evening, there was the crack of a rifle. Prescott heard the bullet whine, and saw the figure in an upper window. Someone else saw it, too, for a police revolver spat, and chips flew from the casement.

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Prescott and the Sergeants went in three different directions.

"Take cover!" yelled the Captain.

It was an unnecessary admonition. The police were behind their automobiles, and the farmer's family had headed for other places. Prescott yelled for the boy he had talked with, and the young fellow, with wary glances toward the house, joined him in the slight shelter of the ditch at the side of the road. Prescott could not remember how he had come through the barbed wire fence.

"Where did he get that gun?" he snapped.

"We got a couple o' shotguns," the boy said apprehensively. "Crows." He was fascinated by the malevolent appearance of his home.

"That wasn't a shotgun," said Prescott. "That was a rifle!"

"Yeah," said the boy. "We got a deer-rifle, too."

"Oh, you've got a deer-rifle, too!" said Prescott. "Maybe you've got a twenty-two, and an elephant gun!"

"We got a twenty-two," said the boy. "No elephant gun."

"How much ammunition for the deer-rifle?"

"Ain't so much," said the boy. "Couple boxes, maybe."

"Only enough to blow us to Kingdom Come!"

"Not if he wastes 'em like that, mister! He musta been shootin' for your heads and forgot to allow for down-hill. He shouldn't never a missed at that range!"

"I don't suppose you would!"

"No, sir," said the boy. "I'd a got you all right."

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The Captain gathered his courage, got to his feet, and joined the Sergeants. There was a three-cornered tear in Dugan's uniform.

"Hallahan," Prescott ordered, "get one of those kids to take you to a telephone, and get us about thirty more men. Have 'em bring tear gas, and some flares. We'll need both."

Hallahan made off down the road.

"Dugan," said Prescott, "issue orders to take the man alive if possible. He's a witness. No one's going to get fired for shooting in self-defense, of course, but he's no use to anyone dead."

"Yes, sir," said Dugan. "What's the plan?"

"It's going to be dark before long," said Prescott, looking at the big orange partially squashed on the western horizon. "We have to get a foothold in the house before then. If we wait too long, he might get away, because we can't make a tight cordon with this number of men."

"He can't defend four sides of the house at once," said Dugan. "Let's see! We've got four men to a side. Suppose I swing 'em around. Then, we'll advance until he starts shooting. The men on his side will take cover and return his fire while the rest try to get into the ground floor. We'd just about have him, if we did that."

"Let's try it," said Prescott. "Give me two whistles when you're ready, and leave orders to advance on that signal."

A few moments later Dugan had two lines moving off, one circling to the west, the other following the line of a fence to the east. There was no shelter other than the two big trees by the house and the fenceposts.

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The men crouched low, but it made the Captain nervous to see the target they made.

Dugan was opposite the house on the east when the back door opened suddenly, and Joseph Parisi, appearing on the threshold, fled like a rabbit across the back yard. He had two shotguns and a rifle under his arm, and Prescott, even at the distance, could see his shirt and pockets bulging with the family's supply of ammunition.

Dugan drew his gun and fired three times. At each shot Joseph ducked, but he kept running. Little spurts of dust marked where the bullets struck, and Prescott saw that the Sergeant was trying to shoot the man's flying feet from under him. Joseph gained the root cellar entrance and threw himself into it.

Dugan, leading the men forward at a run, circled the root cellar, gaining shelter behind it and through the adjoining farm buildings. Prescott waved the four men on the west to converge on the house and met them at the door. Two he stationed east of the house in the shelter of the elms where they overlooked the cellar entrance. The other two he put on the west, overlooking the barnyard. He himself went through the house to the back door which was less than thirty feet from the cellar, but not in a direct line with its entrance.

The door gave onto a stoop, two steps off the ground, on which was standing a slop pail and a rag mop. The kitchen into which it opened was littered with pots and pans and dirty dishes.

The one-entranced root cellar was a perfect spot to withstand attack. Nothing but tear gas could get Joseph out while his ammunition lasted. Of the

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seventeen men surrounding him, nine were sheltered in the farm buildings or behind the heaped roof of the cellar; two had found rather imaginary cover along the fence to the east, and there were the four Prescott had just placed. These last and the Captain himself were the only ones directly commanding the cellar entrance.

Dugan circled the house and joined the Captain in the kitchen. "We got more men in the barnyard than we need," he said. "How about pulling four of 'em out, and throwing them across the gap there between the fence and the tree, right in front of the entrance. That's the alley he'll make for, if he breaks."

"Wait till it's dark."

The daylight was fading rapidly. The silence of evening deepened. Prescott, half expecting Parisi to make a break during the first moments of darkness, strained to hear any sound that might come from the cellar, but everything was deadly quiet. There were chickens in the vicinity to judge from the sound, and cattle. There were strained lowings from the barn, the thud of bodies, the clatter of stanchions.

The Captain heard rather than saw Dugan's four men moving into place. He wished the reinforcements would arrive.

A movement caught his eye by the entrance of the cellar. The shadows were suddenly split by a tongue of flame.

Somebody said, "God damn!"

And Dugan's voice: "You two get him into the house!"  
Prescott called, "Hurt bad?"

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"Where he sits down. Serves him right for leaving it out."

Prescott heard the clump of feet as two men carried their wounded fellow into the front room, and there was a creak of wood and springs as they set him down. The man swore miserably, and Prescott was unfeeling enough to yell, "Shut up!" His eyes were on the dark entry way.

He could make out Joseph's silent shape, watched it for several seconds. Then he said, sharply, "Here he comes! Look out!"

The night was suddenly full of sharp, stabbing roars, and flaming sparks leapt bright. The police, aiming low, peppered bullets at the man's feet with the sound of summer rain. For an instant he stood his ground. Then, abruptly, he turned and disappeared.

Somebody said, "A fine bunch of marksmen!"

The madman laughed suddenly, a high-pitched, uncertain laugh that wasn't funny. Everything was silent, then, except for the groaning of the man in the front room, and the noise of startled animals moving and stamping.

Joseph Parisi tried no further break. He lay in the cellar, and sometimes his gun boomed, and they caught the flash of it through the doorway. There were no sounds from the cordon.

Then the Captain heard the noise of motors on the road, and called to Dugan to bring the reserves to the house. Presently the thud of uncertain feet on the rutted drive told him that the tear gas and the end were almost come.

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Dugan and someone else came into the dark kitchen. Dugan said, "Everything's here."

"Take the flares around to the men back of the cellar," said Prescott. "Have them keep one going on the crest over the door until it's all over. Watch out that Parisi doesn't pop out of there and take a pot at the man that lights it."

He said to the Sergeant who had come with the reinforcements, "Who the hell are you?"

"O'Reilly, sir."

“In at start and finish, eh?”

“That’s right, sir. I was on the desk that night. There was something about secrecy, wasn’t there?”

“Humph!” said Prescott. “You’ll admit it would have been better for a little secrecy!” He added, “Throw your men in front of the cellar entrance. I’ve a thin line across there now, but we’ll need more. Keep ’em back far enough so that the flare doesn’t light ’em up, and let ’em take Parisi when he comes out.”

“You think he’s coming that way?”

“It’s the logical place. It’s so open. No shelter. Hold your fire if you can.”

“Yes, sir,” said O’Reilly. “We’ll get him!”

“Tell Dugan when you’re placed; and when you’re both ready, toss the tear gas in!”

“Yes, sir! Here’s a mask, if you need it. If the boys make a good shot of it, you won’t. It’ll stay in the cellar.”

The flare lit up at that moment, revealing the figure of a policeman on the roof of the cellar, retreating with a rapid, crablike crawl. The flare threw a weird, pinkish light over everything, and the thin

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line of police between the house and the fence retreated until they could scarcely be seen in the darkness. The entrance of the root cellar was in shadow, but they heard Joseph Parisi laughing.

O’Reilly left. The crazy laughter continued. Prescott shifted from one foot to another, searching the darkness beyond the circle of light for the movement that would mark the placing of the men.

He whirled and said sharply, “Who’s there?”

“Only me,” said a voice. “Jerry Keenan.”

“Reporters!” said Prescott. “How many are there?”

“Oh, we’re all here, at varying distances from the fray.”

“Well, you’d better get out.”

“Don’t mind if I stay and see the fun, do you? I’ll sit in the sink.” He moved across to the windows and peered out. “Ghastly kind of light,” he said. “Makes you think of dead men!”

Prescott grunted, and kept waiting for the “whush!” of the tear gas. The light began to fade, and the policeman on top of the cellar crawled forward to light another that burned bright before the first expired.

“Quite a system,” said Jerry affably. “I see you’re massing the troops across the front. What if he runs for the barns?”

“There’s men there,” said Prescott. “Shut up, will you?”

“A little chatter never comes amiss, even in a grave moment.”

“The hell it doesn’t!” said Prescott. “Shut up or get out!”

He was keyed up. The end of the chase. The excitement

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of danger was making him curl up inside and feel as though he had a stomach-ache. A tight, hard ball of fear in his midriff. Fear! Good God, what was there to be afraid of when almost fifty men had one poor lunatic surrounded!

Time dragged. Prescott coughed.

Why in hell, he thought, don’t they get it over with?

And, as though in answer, the gun whushed, and there was the noise of the breaking cylinder inside the cellar. And then, before the gas could have reached him, Joseph Parisi came out.

He came out whooping, carrying three guns. He fired a double-barreled shotgun first, directly in front of him. He dropped that and whirled around, spraying the root cellar roof with the second. And when that was empty, he cocked the repeating rifle. The police clung to the ground.

Joseph Parisi stood outside the cellar, and looked like the statue of a challenging soldier. Then he turned and started to run. But he did not run toward the broad opening where Prescott had been sure he would go.

Jerry Keenan gasped, “Good God! He’s coming here!”

Someone took a shot at the loping figure as it came toward the stoop, and Prescott heard the bullet hit wood, and remembered it distinctly afterwards, as he did the cold feel of the revolver in his hand. He couldn’t remember getting it from his pocket, but there it was.

The screen door banged open. Joseph Parisi’s bulk

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filled the narrow doorway, gigantic against the pink flare. Prescott looked down the black hole of the rifle, and thought how small it was.

The redness of the flare came through the kitchen windows, and Prescott knew its light must shine directly on him, revealing him to Joseph Parisi.

How long they stood there, Prescott did not know. Long enough for him to remember queer things, fleetingly: Kay Lewis saying, “The thought of

his being dead isn't as terrible as the memory of that night!" and Alice Rollins screaming at him, "He wasn't in love with anything but his God-damn silly apparatus!"

But that didn't take very long.

Then he found himself moving. His legs were driving him toward the man in the doorway. He saw the rifle tense, shift. Still he drove on, knowing that he couldn't reach his goal—the point of Parisi's chin—before the gun went off.

Joseph's finger tightened on the trigger. The light of the flare, coming through the screen door, spotlighted it, and the screen, Prescott was to remember, made a queer shaded pattern on the hand. But it did not hide the tightening of the finger.

The gun spat, and Prescott felt himself halted by a blow like a heavy fist on his shoulder. It brought his driving legs to a standstill, and his leaning body upright, and it spun him around sideways, so that when the gun spoke again, the bullet missed.

Then it was his turn. He will tell you that he was never surer in his life of what he wanted to do. He wanted to disable Joseph's gun arm, no more. But

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he pressed the trigger and held it down while the gun kicked four times.

And then, because his knees seemed to have no strength, he sat down, and it was providential that a chair was behind him or he should have sprawled ignominiously on the floor.

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## CHAPTER XXIX

### The Warning Justified

CAPTAIN PRESCOTT sat looking at the figure of Joseph Parisi huddled in the doorway, and suddenly he said, "Hell!"

The screen door banged, and it was Dugan. There were others behind him.

"Find out if he's dead," snapped Prescott.

The Sergeant's examination was brief. He said, "You might bring him back alive if we can get a doctor quick enough."

"Hell!" repeated Prescott furiously. "I shot for his arm!"

"You got his arm," said Dugan. "Only you kept on shooting, and it sprayed him like a machine gun."

Prescott felt little like talking, so he watched them while they stood around waiting for the doctor. The doctor got there after a while, and he looked over Joseph first, though Dugan kept insisting that Joseph didn't count. The doctor made Joseph as easy as he could, and then ripped Prescott's coat and shirt off his shoulder, swabbed the hole with something that made it feel worse, and tied it up. He gave the Captain a shot in the arm with a syringe, and told him he'd be all right, and then he went off to find the other man.

Prescott insisted on walking out to the ambulance,

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but he felt a little sick after he had done it, and the jiggling ride back to town, while he sat looking at the silent body of the man who had shot him and whom he had shot, was interminable. His shoulder felt like a knife was sticking it at every jolt of the ambulance.

But he walked into the hospital when they got there, and kept insisting to white-gowned doctors and nurses that they attend to Joseph first, because Joseph had to live, Joseph was the only one who could prove his theory about the Sylvester murder. And he told them how he had intended to shoot Joseph in the arm, and got quite angry when they insisted on dressing his wound again, and it was Dugan's big hands that held him into a chair. Dugan was still there when they took his clothes off and put him into a nightgown that was too short for him—too damn short for anyone, as he



told them—and it was Dugan who sat beside him in the dark until he finally let his mind slow down like a phonograph in need of winding, and went to sleep.

He awoke clear-headed, looked around, saw where he was, and thought, I'll have a devil of a time getting out of here!

There was no one around, so he sat up gingerly, wincing, but surprised to find his shoulder bothering him as little as it did. Presently he slid to the floor and tried out his knees. They were watery, and his head spun as he crossed to the bathroom, but he felt better on the trip back, and his determination to get out grew.

He had pulled on a clean shirt that someone had

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provided and had climbed into his pants before they caught him. It was his tie that held him up.

The nurse gasped and said, "Oh, Captain! You can't do that!"

"I'll say I can't!" said the Captain. "Tie it, will you?"

"I mean you shouldn't be up! You lost a lot of blood last night, and you're not strong enough!"

"Help me with the tie before I bust the wound open!"

The nurse tied it, protesting.

Dugan arrived, and a grin of sheer joy broke over his face. "So they can't keep you down!" he crowed. "Well, say! And here the morning papers all have you badly wounded!"

The Sergeant had a couple of papers under his arm, and he tossed them on the bed. The black headlines announced the capture of Parisi. There was a picture of the madman, and of Louis B. Prescott, too, and the caption said something about a hero.

The story was imaginative, and the drama of the meeting between the madman and his nemesis was not neglected. The gun fight sounded like something Billy the Kid might have shrunk from.

Prescott read and scowled and grinned. He appreciated the irony of the papers idolizing him this morning when they had bawled for his resignation yesterday, but the stories did him good. He read everything, snorting all the way, and he was looking for more when he noticed the lead story on the other side of the front page under the heading, "Police Get Confession in Toscarello Murder."

Sharply, he said, "Who gave this out?"

Dugan, looking blank at the tone, said, "I did. You said you'd give the boys their interview later in the evening. When you couldn't, I did. Was I wrong?"

Prescott said, "It's all right. Apparently, it wasn't up to either Miss James or me to play God. The role was assigned to you, Sergeant.... Skip it!" he added, as the Sergeant seemed startled. "And get this! Move fast! ..."

The instructions left Dugan gaping. "Good God—what for?"

"For murder! Dr. Sylvester's. And hurry—you may be too late!"

Dugan departed on the run, bewildered, but admiring.

The doctor came in just as Prescott was downing the last of his coffee. He looked disapproving, took his patient's pulse and temperature without a word, and finally asked, "Dizzy?"

"At first. Not now."

The doctor started to say something, gave a little sigh instead, and then remarked, a little bitterly, "You're a remarkably young man for your age, Captain! The life you lead, I suppose."

Prescott decided he was feeling pretty good that morning in spite of his wound. Remarkably young! he thought. To hell with that taxi driver! I'm going to find him and give him a ticket.

Aloud he said, "How about Parisi?"

"He'll recover," said the doctor.

"Is he conscious? Can I talk with him?"

The doctor shook his head gravely. "It wouldn't be wise. More to the point, you'd get nothing from him. He's quite out of his head."

It made no difference, Prescott thought. Since Dugan gave the story to the papers, it made no difference. Events were out of his hands.

It was about twenty minutes before he was summoned to the telephone, and he knew what it was before he answered. He thought, the telephone is going to end it, as it began it! And he was sure he knew what the end would be.

Dugan's voice was heavy over the wire. "We got a confession, chief," he said. "How did you guess?"

Prescott said, "Then you were in time?"

But Dugan said, “Well, no! But she left a letter about six pages long, telling all about it.”

“And she?”

“Miss Lewis is dead,” said Dugan. “She stabbed herself. It couldn’t have been but a few minutes before we got here.”

## CHAPTER XXX

### A Ghost at the Board

“TO what,” asked Leslie James, “am I indebted?”

“Curiosity,” grinned Louis Prescott. “I had to know how you outguessed me by twenty-four hours. Or was it more?”

“So a ghost dines with us,” she said.

The Captain was embarrassed. “I always lunch here,” he said. “I didn’t think.”

“It’s all right. I’ve wanted to hash things over, and this is as good a place as any.... Well, what finally gave you the answer, Captain?” .

“After your highly disturbing visit set me thinking,” said Prescott, “I started to reconstruct the sequence events must have taken if Alice Rollins had been the murderer. Among others, there was the question of the weapon: would she have known about the knives in the surgery and the key in the office? I figured she would, having worked at the hospital. Of course the surgery door was unlocked, and Miss Lewis had the key, but Alice Rollins, or anyone else, wouldn’t have known that. The door was shut. She—or, again, anyone else—would have assumed it was locked, hurried to the office for the key, and spent an ungodly time searching for something that wasn’t there!

“Well, the logic wasn’t fool-proof, because someone

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might have run directly to the surgery in a blind passion, forgetting the key, but the fact that Miss Lewis was the only one who knew the door was unlocked made me think of her as a real possibility for the first time, and that led me to realize that there might be an explanation other than the framing of Parisi for the lack of struggle.”

“Frankly,” said Leslie James, “I don’t see how you overlooked that.”

“I hadn’t been able to conceive of Bert Sylvester’s being stabbed to death without a struggle, but there was one person he mightn’t have raised a hand against—the woman he loved. I’d gotten into my head—to make an excuse—that he didn’t love her, but he did—as a sister or a mother, at least. Schlosser told me one day that for Sylvester Miss Lewis was untouchable, and that was true in more ways than Schlosser meant it, I think.

“Anyway, it was an alternative to the framing theory, and once I saw it, I began to see other things that fitted in.

“I knew that an excited, angry person might have made the wounds, but I hadn’t had any excited person till then.

“There had been no evidence of a quarrel which might have led to murder, but I had been looking for one in the foyer when all the time it had taken place in 310. The gentleman across the hall had heard it, but I hadn’t known whether to believe him or not. Miss Lewis caught the doctor turning Parisi loose, and not understanding that he was forced to do it, had tried to stop him.

“I saw, too, that my deductions about the fingerprints

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and the disposal of the knife, pointing to the Hughes staff, had been quite sound, though I had hesitated to believe them.

“And finally, there was the motive which had been under my nose all the time. The whole fitted into a pattern too neat to be doubted.

“And now suppose you talk for a change. I imagine you guessed the answer Tuesday night—looking back I see I could have. As a matter of fact, I came so close it wasn’t funny. The very first thing that struck me wrong was Miss Lewis’ fainting. I don’t know yet whether it was real or not, but it struck my police instincts as phony. Only I didn’t follow it up.”

“I really did suspect that first night,” said Leslie James. “I saw the alternative to the framing theory right away, knowing Bert and Kay as well as I did, but I hated to believe it. Then, during her interview with you, some of the things she said made me wonder. I began to realize what her reason might have been.

“But it wasn’t until that luncheon we had that I was sure. Your explanation of the fingerprints and the disposal of the knife were the clinching arguments. On top of that, Kay practically told us why she had done it, but you missed that.

“When we left, I asked her a few questions—they brought out about the surgery key for one thing—and that settled it.”

The Captain said, “It was her apparent lack of motive that kept me from taking her as a serious suspect.”

“She almost told you, twice. During that first interview, remember what she said about finding Bert

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on the campus one night—gibbering? She said, ‘The thought of his being dead isn’t as terrible as the memory of that night.’ And during the luncheon, she capped that with, ‘I was worried for fear he might have a breakdown. He was going beyond his strength.’ She thought Bert had gone insane. Jumping to conclusions, of course. She was no psychologist.”

“The funny thing,” said Prescott, “is that I thought he was crazy, too. I heard about all the things that she observed—the persecution mania, the depression, the manic-depressive cycles—and I thought I had the explanation of his turning Parisi loose just as she did. I followed her reasoning all the way through.”

“Things at the hospital hurt her so,” said Leslie. “Remember what she said: ‘He kept talking about the terrible things that happen out here, and about the shameless, filthy creatures that he wanted to “cure”! Sometimes I thought I couldn’t stand it any longer. Sometimes I thought—what didn’t I think? ... I hated the hospital! It was doing things to him—’ ”

Prescott said, “I realized almost from the first how sensitive she was to what she saw here. A person as sensitive as Miss Lewis couldn’t live and work there and look on the world normally.”

“I suppose,” said Leslie James, “it affects some that way. It isn’t like that when you understand, when you know the ‘why.’ Kay never did. It’s no worse than a gangrenous wound, or some other physical mutilation.”

“I suppose not,” said Prescott.

But he doubted it. Remembering 312, he could understand what Kay Lewis had meant when she wrote in her letter of confession:

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“I thought Bert had gone insane, and I thought of what that meant—of what I had seen in my work at the hospital. I thought of the horrible, naked beastliness of it, the debased desires, the filthy habits, the shameless disintegration. I had cared for those who had delusions of persecution, and for cases of melancholia, and for manic-depressives. I knew what it meant. I knew what they were like.

“And I couldn’t bear to think of Bert’s being like that. I had thought a hundred times that I’d rather see him dead.

“Before that Tuesday night it had been in my mind for two weeks.

“And then, when I went to the foyer with Dr. Lownds, I saw Bert when he went up to the second floor, and I knew something was desperately

wrong. I can't describe how he looked, except that it frightened me. Back in my corridor, I kept thinking about it.

"Then the patient in 103 had her accident, and I went for bandages, and found Johnny Dennis wasn't in his office. And then I knew that something horrible was going to happen, something involving Bert. I don't know how I knew, but I did.

"I hurried with 103, but when I finally could leave, I found Dr. Thomas in the hall, and he insisted on talking interminably. Finally I said 102 was waking, and that got rid of him. I went into 102 for a minute to give him a chance to leave the building. Then I hurried to the foyer. Johnny Dennis was still missing.

"Bert had been so long in the building that he must have reached the third floor. I ran up, and looked into the first room I came to—Parisi's. Parisi was dressed, ready to go out. I asked Bert what he intended to do. He told me.

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"And then I knew he was insane. I had been sure for weeks what had been happening, but his freeing of Parisi seemed to prove that the break had come at last.

"I argued, or tried to. After a minute, he pulled me away from the door, and, with a roughness he had never used, pushed me so that I fell. I was stunned, shocked. It took me a minute to pull myself together. Then I raced after him, ran down the stairs.

"I was too late. Bert was returning to the foyer, alone.

"I knew I had to make him bring Parisi back. If the hospital found out what he had done, they would know he was mad.

"I got a knife from the surgery, and told him if he didn't go after Parisi, I'd kill him. He must have been afraid of our being heard, for he drew me into the office and closed the door. He tried to explain, but I kept thinking of Parisi getting farther and farther away, and I wouldn't listen. I begged and threatened and begged, but I was careful to keep my voice low because no one must know of the escape until Parisi was back. But Bert wouldn't listen.

"Then I knew how hopeless it was, and I must have gone mad myself. I saw them finding out what he had done, putting him in one of those horrible bolted-down rooms. I saw him going to pieces, as I had seen so many others go.

“I remember the hurt, bewildered look on his face. I remember his sliding to the floor, and drawing up his knees like a hurt child.

“He was dead. I had killed him, and it was like a shock of cold water. I thought of going to Richards at once. Then I remembered he’d ask why, and

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I couldn’t tell him that Bert had gone insane and freed a lunatic. That would have been doing to Bert what I had killed him to prevent. I couldn’t brand him insane, now that he was dead. Let him live in memory as a genius.

“I thought of fingerprints, of the bloody knife, of my soiled hands. I used my handkerchief to open the door, wiping the handle as I did so. I knew other prints wouldn’t matter. I went to the lavatory, washed my hands and the knife, tore my handkerchief and flushed it down the toilet, and hid the knife. Then I waited in the foyer until I could get back to 102 unseen.

“It was during a luncheon with Captain Prescott that I began to realize what I had done. This morning, reading the paper, I knew the true explanation of Bert’s actions, and that he had been as sane—or saner—than I. I had leapt to conclusions, thinking I knew all there was to know about symptoms and psychoses.

“What I am about to do now is the only thing left.

“If I’d had the sense to talk it out with Bert! We’d talked out a hundred things before. Why should it have been this time that I was afraid to ask?

“It was all so futile! It was all so mad ... insane ...”

She had signed her name in full, the neat slanting script of her writing trembling for the first time.

THE END

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